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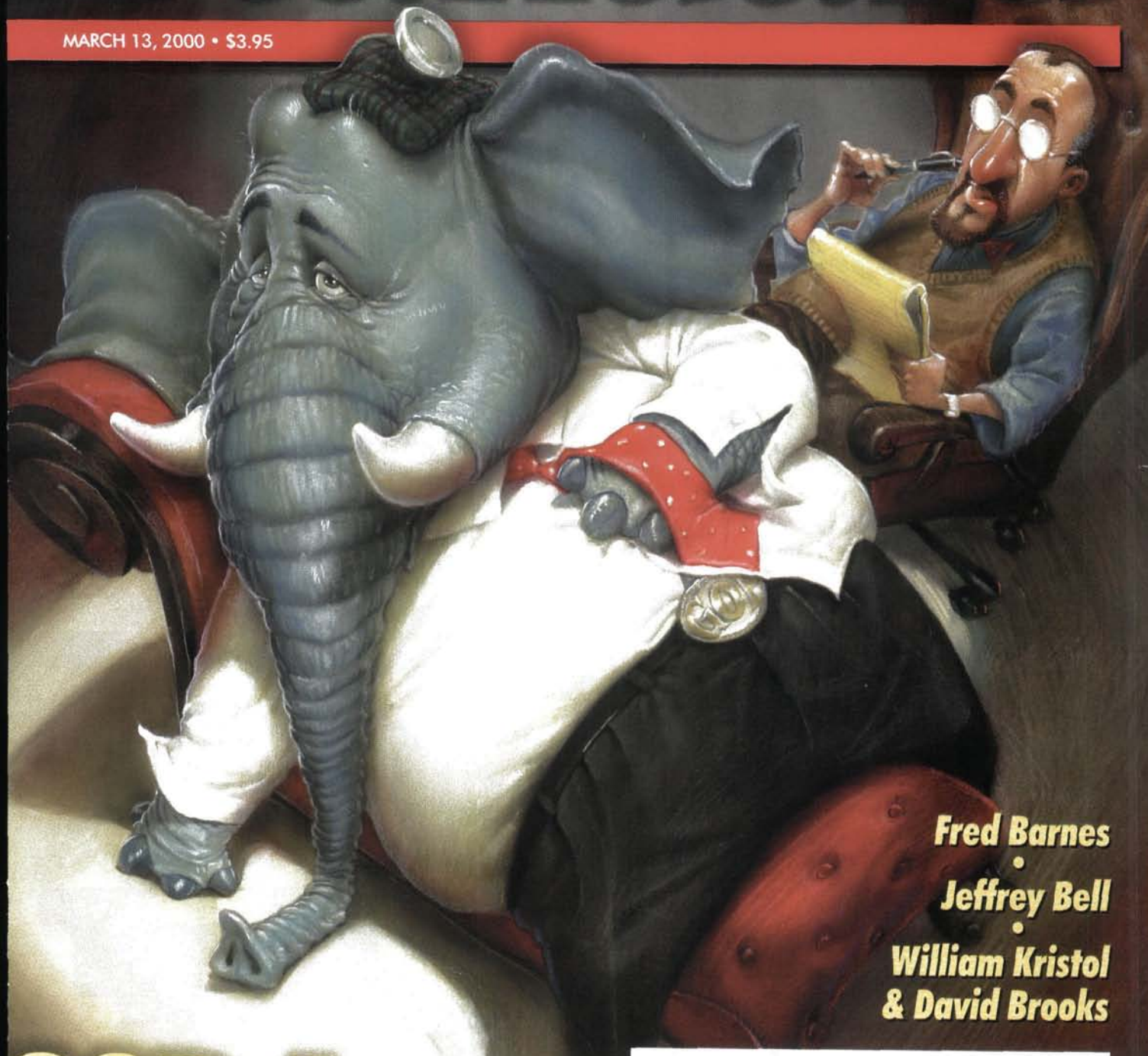
the weekly Standard

MARCH 13, 2000 • $3.95



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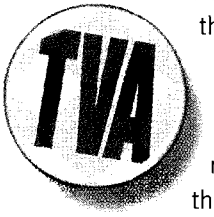
THE UNTOUCHABLES

CO-OPS, MUNIS AND FEDERALLY-OWNED UTILITIES— "UNTOUCHED" BY REFORM

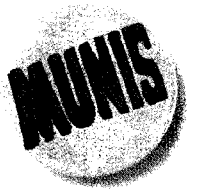
There once was a time when the debate over the restructuring of America's utility industry was seen as an opportunity to correct decades-old competitive imbalances in the marketplace. This would have meant a leveling of the proverbial "playing field"... with rural electric co-ops and municipal-owned utilities being forced to give up many of their conspicuous federally-conferred privileges. This would also have meant getting the federal government out of the electricity business by putting the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) on a path towards privatization.

This debate never happened. Instead, co-ops, munis and federally-owned utilities have not only escaped fundamental reform—they are on the verge of grabbing numerous new advantages for themselves.



The "Jurassic" federally-owned utilities—genuine museum pieces, they are—will lumber along as if the restructuring debate never occurred... because for them it didn't!

City Hall-owned utilities—municipal monopolists who resist every call for competition—are now likely to secure new tax-exempt giveaways for themselves... at our expense.



The co-ops have achieved a prodigious booty of carve-outs, exemptions, exclusions and special favors for themselves—and they still want more. Much more!

What happened to the great "restructuring" debate? Things that should have been at the top of Congress' reform agenda... are now at the top of Congress' untouchables list.

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the weekly Standard

THE WEEKLY STANDARD (ISSN 1083-3013) is published weekly (except the second week in April, the second week in July, the last week in August, and the first week in January) by News America Incorporated, 1211 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to THE WEEKLY STANDARD, P.O. Box 96127, Washington, DC 20077-7767. For subscription customer service in the United States, call 1-800-274-7293. For new subscription orders, please call 1-800-283-2014. Subscribers: Please send new subscription orders to THE WEEKLY STANDARD, P.O. Box 96153, Washington, DC 20090-6153; changes of address to THE WEEKLY STANDARD, P.O. Box 96127, Washington, DC 20077-7767. Please include your latest magazine mailing label. Allow 3 to 5 weeks for arrival of first copy and address changes. Yearly subscriptions, $78.00. Canadian/foreign orders require additional postage and must be paid in full prior to commencement of service. Canadian/foreign subscribers may call 1-303-776-3605 for subscription inquiries. Visa/MasterCard payment accepted. Cover price, $3.95. Back issues, $3.95 (includes postage and handling). Send manuscripts and letters to the editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD, 1150 17th Street, N.W., Suite 505, Washington, DC 20036-4617. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. THE WEEKLY STANDARD Advertising Sales Office in Washington, DC, is 1-202-293-4900. Advertising Production: Call Ian Slatter 1-202-496-3354. Copyright 2000, News America Incorporated. All rights reserved. No material in THE WEEKLY STANDARD may be reprinted without permission of the copyright owner. THE WEEKLY STANDARD is a trademark of News America Incorporated.

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59 Minutes Would Be Fine By Us

Did'ja ever wonder what happens to pompous curmudgeons who get paid millions of dollars to sound off in "humor" segments on TV newsmagazine shows for several decades after they've ceased being funny? Well, if you're Andy Rooney, you get invited to New York's Overseas Press Club of America, there to browbeat aspiring young journalists on the corrosive influence of money in network news programming.

Addressing the group in January, Rooney said the news business would be better off if it were controlled by a "quasi-government body," as opposed to the greedhead executives obsessed with turning a buck to garner ratings (which helps them pay the selfless newshounds on *60 Minutes*, where the average correspondent pulls down seven figures annually).

Rooney conceded that when his contract ends, he'll try to gouge his employers for "twice as much as I'm making now." But he stipulated that he'd gladly drop to a quarter of his salary, if he could find just one network executive that "was dedicated to news instead of money." That way, they could hire 20 more Rooneys, fearless in tackling the day's great sociopolitical conundrums, like, "Which is older, the slinky or the hula hoop?"

During his speech, Rooney did trip over one good idea. He said he'd like to see Nielsen devise a way to rate television shows not by the number of viewers, but by the collective IQ of the audience. "This would be good for news," Rooney said. "It might put an end to the success of such mindless shows as *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*." Better still, it might put an end to the success of unfunny TV "humorists," not that we're mentioning any names. ♦

The Truth About Priests and AIDS

The *Kansas City Star* made a huge splash in late January with an exclusive survey of Catholic priests, purporting to show an epidemic of AIDS cutting a swath through the clergy, which presumably makes a mockery of the church's practice of priestly celibacy. Priests, of course, like all people, sometimes scandalously fail to live up to their solemn vows. But the rate at which they fail, it turns out, can't be reliably determined from the three-part series in the *Kansas City Star*.

To begin with, the paper's sample was not statistically valid, which it at least acknowledged in a sidebar (only 27 percent responded to its survey, which was mailed to some 3,000 priests). But more misleading was its claim that priests are dying of AIDS at a rate "four times that of the general population." This was the soundbite that made its way into everyone else's headlines and TV news reports. But as the Statistical Assessment Service points out in its February newsletter (see *www.stats.org*), "an appropriate comparison group for priests is surely not the general population, which includes women and children, but rather adult males," whose AIDS-related death rate is precisely the same, 4 per 10,000, that the *Star* projected for priests. There's a headline you don't see too often, "Priests: A Lot Like Other Men." ♦

The Great Divide

Bob Jones University last week clarified its reasons for forbidding interracial dating:

"Is there a Bible principle upon which the university's interracial dating stance is founded? Yes," the school's website states. "The one-world principle—every effort man has made, or will make, to bring the world together in unity—plays into the hands of the Antichrist. . . . At the Tower of Babel, God used language to disrupt man's plans for a one-world government. As a result . . . the people were scattered and the races were polarized. One thing is clear: God wanted a divided world, not a federalized world."

Glad they cleared that up. Guess George W. Bush's message—"I'm a uniter, not a divider"—didn't change many hearts. ♦

A Lesson on Education Reform

Though still in its early stages, the Washington Scholarship Fund, a pioneering program of private assistance to enable poor children in Washington, D.C., to attend private schools, has received its first outside assessment. A new report from Harvard University's Program on Education Policy and Governance provides mostly good news for the burgeoning movement to give privately funded tuition vouchers to students who

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would otherwise attend horrifically underperforming public schools.

After seven months in their new schools, second- through fifth-grade D.C. students who received the scholarships are scoring modestly better on standardized math tests than their public-school peers. Reading scores were statistically similar between the two groups. Sixth- through eighth-grade private-school students, however, scored lower on reading tests than public-school students. Math scores among the two groups were basically the same. "Students in their middle years," the report suggests, "have found it difficult to adjust when moving from a public school to a private school."

What accounts for the differences in performance between the age groups? Perhaps the answer is discipline. According to the Harvard researchers, "Suspension rates reported by parents for younger students are similar in private and public schools, . . . but considerably higher in private school than in public school for students in grades 6-8, 20 percent as compared to 3 percent." Thus, "whereas younger students attending private schools are more likely than public-school students to say students are proud to attend my school, the opposite results are attained for students in the middle years." In other words, the older kids are bummed out that they're going to tougher schools than the ones they left.

Parents, on the other hand, are thrilled. The study points out that "46 percent of private-school parents gave their school an 'A,' as compared to 15 percent of public-school parents." And in an age when school safety is on the minds of parents and politicians alike, 60 percent of private-school parents said they were "very satisfied" with school safety, while only 20 percent of public-school parents said the same. The report is obviously preliminary, but it strongly suggests that students should be exposed to a solid academic environment as early as possible. If the educrats keep dragging their feet and avoid real reform, students will pay the price. ♦

Not to Mention Myself

Correction of the week, from the Feb. 19 *International Herald Tribune*: "An article in some editions Friday about a lawsuit in Israel filed by the heirs of Charlie Chaplin misstated Woody Allen's assessment of the number of comic geniuses of the past century. In addition to Chaplin and W.C. Fields, Mr. Allen has put Buster Keaton, Groucho and Harpo Marx and Peter Sellers in that category." ♦

Help Wanted

The *National Interest* is looking for an assistant editor. College graduates with an interest in international affairs, a strong command of the English language, computer/Internet skills, and preferably some editorial experience should send a résumé and two brief writing samples to: Managing Editor, The *National Interest*, 1112 16th Street, NW, Suite 540, Washington, DC 20036. ♦

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Casual

Don't *Tutoyer* Me, Baby

I went to the University of Chicago, which is considered, as the world reckons these things, a fairly serious place. Heavy, grey, false yet nevertheless massively impressive Gothic architecture. First atom split in a handball court by Enrico Fermi & Co. Enough Nobel prize winners to field a weak softball team. Great books all over the joint. Students determined, in several polls, to have less fun than at any other school in the nation. So why is it that, when the chairman of the university's Board of Trustees sends me an announcement of the appointment of the school's new president, just about everyone in the accompanying press release refers to the new president—a musicologist named Don M. Randel—as "Don"? Call him by his first name, and all that is august in his new office slips right off him. Perhaps I ought to be grateful that they don't refer to him as "Donnie," or perhaps (who knows?) "Skippy." But even "Don" feels all wrong. Gravity—it ought to be a law.

The French have the useful verb *tutoyer*, which means to address another person in the second-person familiar; usually to do so suggests intimacy, but it can also suggest contemptuous familiarity. Since we don't have a second-person familiar in English, we go to first names. Too readily, in my view. I may be a bit raw here. I've been getting Joe'd around a lot lately—better, I suppose, than being Jack'd around, but still more than a little irritating.

I send a fax to a software company, addressed "Dear Sir or Madam" and I get a letter beginning "Dear Joseph" back. Young men with strong New York accents and soft names have been known to telephone me, early in the day, to say, "Joe, Tyler Ginsberg here. Have you heard about these 791 high-yield, tax-free bonds? Now's the time to make your move." "Tyler, sweetheart," I reply, "have we met before?" "No, not really, but these bonds are a terrific . . ." "Tyler," I say before hanging up, "go *tutoyer* yourself, pal." Lots of telemarketers seem to go to my first name. "Is this Joseph?" they ask. So, increasingly, do merchants and artisans in face-to-face encounters. "Pleased you could come by, Mr. Nelli," I recently said upon

Darren Gygi

meeting a house painter who had come in to give us an estimate on painting our kitchen. "Call me Chuck, Joe." I found I couldn't do it. Henceforth I compromised and called him nothing.

As a university teacher, I continue to call my students by their last names, always preceded by Mr. and Miss. Almost all my colleagues call their students by their first names, and many of them are perfectly happy to allow the students to call them by their own first names. A charming student whom I had befriended dropped by not long after his graduation and called me Joe. I told him I preferred he wait three full years before doing so. Good kid, he did. Another student of mine, whom, after his being out of school for many years, I invited to call me Joseph or Joe, said that he couldn't do it, and if I didn't mind he'd like to continue calling me Professor Epstein. Despite the fact that I think of the title "professor" as one best accorded to the guy who plays the piano in the bordello, I didn't argue the point, and "professor" I remain to him.

I wish I gave off sufficient high dignity to prevent being so often "first-named" by people I would prefer to "mister" me. But I'm not sure anyone today does give off such dignity. I've become less convinced, in fact, that a yearning for familiarity, or an attempt to establish fake intimacy, is always at the heart of calling strangers by their first names. In many instances, the persons doing so—telemarketers especially—cannot pronounce a last name of any complication, and so using a first name becomes not a gambit but a necessity. Going at things the other way round, if you ask someone you are dealing with for his name, and he answers "Bob," he is giving away a lot less than if he had answered "Robert Ortacelli," his last name at least permitting one to place him ethnically. Insisting on plain "Bob" is perhaps as close as one can come to retaining one's anonymity; it can be damn chilling, in fact.

The first person to note this tendency of Americans to call one another by first names on short acquaintance—or no acquaintance whatsoever—was an English writer of immitigably highbrow taste and great social hauteur named Vernon Young, whom I met only once. We exchanged perhaps 30 letters, with neither of us ever coming close to addressing the other by his first name. He once wrote to me about how deeply he detested being called Vernon by people who scarcely knew him. "My way of dealing with this," he noted, "is really quite efficient. I say to them, 'My close friends call me Vernon. Won't you do likewise?'" A good thing, of course, that the narrator of *Moby Dick* wasn't of a like mind, else that great novel would have begun, "Don't—whatever you do—call me Ishmael."

Joseph Epstein

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COMMENTARIES

The GOP enters the election year well positioned and ready to wage political war by Jim Nicholson

Why Bill Bradley Will Win New Hampshire
Why is Bill Bradley going to win The First in the Nation Democrat Presidential Primary in New Hampshire on February 1, 2000? It's simple... by David Carney

The Death of Ideology?
There is an old axiom in political science: When things are going well, people don't care who governs by Harvey Harlowe Hukari

THE GOP SPOTLIGHT
George Bush Presidential Library and Museum
The other Presidential Libraries, the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum also a research institution, totally integrated into the academic environment of Texas A&M University. The Bush Library's collections include 38,000,000 pages of official and personal papers, 1,000,000 photographs, 2,500 hours of videotape, and 70,000 museum objects. Library web site

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Overbearing OSHA

I applaud Matt Labash on his insightful article "Hooked on Ergonomics" (Feb. 28). There is one point that is clear about OSHA's proposed ergonomics rule: It will be the costliest government job mandate since the founding of the United States. After careful dissection of OSHA cost-benefit analysis, we found that the agency made innumerable errors, omissions, and unsupported assumptions. Correction of just seven of the major OSHA errors could result in up to $100 billion in additional annual costs to employers—not the $4.2 billion OSHA has claimed.

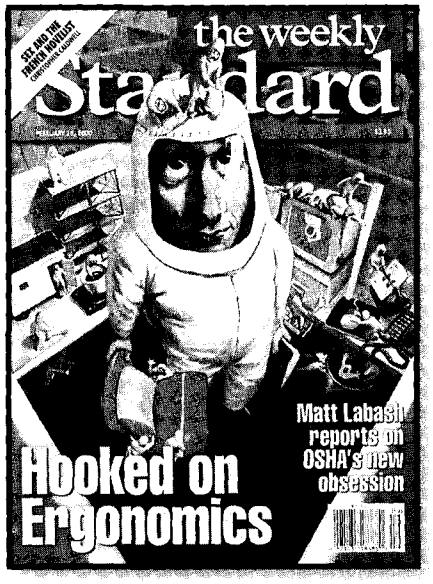
One particularly egregious error we found concerned the amount of time it will take managers and others to implement the regulations. OSHA calculated one hour of time for management to become familiar with the rule; however, as Labash noted, the regulatory and guidance text that OSHA published is over 300 pages. Even assuming a rapid reading rate of 110 words/minute (a fast rate of comprehension for regulatory material), it would take 15 hours to read the material. Thus, familiarization costs alone could be as high as $3.3 billion—not the $200 million OSHA calculated for its estimate.

Another problem with OSHA's analysis is that it assumes laypersons act in the same manner as government experts. OSHA claims that their program will reduce the incidence of musculoskeletal disorders by half, but their data are derived from studies of programs supervised by professional "ergonomists." No trials have been done on shop managers—those who will have direct responsibility for identifying and fixing ergonomic hazards in the workplace (the same people OSHA thinks can read regulatory text at the rate of Superman).

Ironically, without federal intervention, the problem has improved on its own, as Labash reported. Continued voluntary efforts by employers will cut the yearly number of cases in half over the next 10 years, according to our analysis.

The bond of trust between government and the people it governs becomes eroded when government regulators do not present intellectually honest explanations and accurate assessments of the economic consequences associated with their proposals. By ignoring abundant sources of credible, objective, empirical data from firms that have already implemented ergonomic programs, OSHA has exposed the public to capricious, arbitrary rule-making. OSHA, quite simply, has not done its homework on the issue. OSHA should withdraw the proposed standard, reexamine its data, consider non-regulatory solutions, and, if it then determines regulation is still needed, design one that is cost-effective.

Ronald E. Bird
Chief Economist
Employment Policy Foundation
Washington, DC



Congratulations to Matt Labash on a well-written and would-be funny article (were it not true) about OSHA and their new lease on life, ergonomic safety. It has become clear that, if we are to regain our liberties in commerce, it cannot be done piecemeal. The goal of regulatory agencies is to gain power incrementally over the lives of the citizenry and the pursuits of private enterprise. The purported agenda, be it safety or clean air, is merely cover for the seizure of power. Unfortunately, too many citizens buy into the ruse.

The Founders knew of government's tendency to expand. And since governments produce no wealth they must seize it to grow and prosper. Either the Republican party miraculously finds its courage, or it lets it die with Ronald Reagan. This is a war and—make no mistake about it—the other side uses the EPA, OSHA, and the IRS to throw roadblocks in the way of capitalism.

Nathan Sax
New Providence, NJ

Defining Debt Down

It seems that David Frum has bought into the *Wall Street Journal*'s "lower-taxes-at-any-cost" philosophy ("Learning to Love the National Debt," Feb. 21). Yes, "Overtaxing Americans [leading to sluggish economic growth, or worse] to repay the national debt will actually lower the capacity of the United States to honor its commitment to Social Security." But there seems to be little risk of "overtaxing." No presidential candidate is talking about raising taxes to repay the debt. Republicans argue over how much to cut taxes; Democrats argue over how to spend the surplus made possible by prosperity and existing tax rates. With what many (including, notably, Alan Greenspan) consider to be an overheated economy, the greater risk to steady growth would come from an irresponsibly large tax cut that led to higher interest rates (with or without inflation).

Frum devotes much of his article to the unhappy, deflationary aftermath of paying off the national debt in 1835. Doesn't he give economists and central bankers credit for having learned something in the ensuing 165 years? Both conceptually and politically, of all economic challenges, deflation is probably the most trivial to overcome (which is why it is so rare). Granted, Treasury bills perform some of the same functions as cash. But whatever deflationary pressures are created by taking interest-bearing monetary surrogates out of circulation (via debt repayment) can instantly be remedied by circulating additional non-interest-bearing "securities," i.e., money itself.

Frum also writes that "what has always mattered most is not the size of the debt in dollar amounts, but the size of the debt relative to the country's ability to pay." True enough. He notes how our national debt went from being larger than our GDP at the end of World War II to being only half that proportion in

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1960. But he doesn't mention that federal debt, as a percentage of GDP, has almost doubled since 1980 (going from 33 percent to 64 percent), and that as a percentage of GDP it now stands well above where it was in 1960. The fact that interest on the national debt accounts for over 25 percent of federal income tax revenues should be troubling to anyone who would like to see lower tax rates.

Now, back to the connection between the national debt and the long-run solvency of Social Security. Frum is a little too cavalier in dismissing the proposition that paying down the national debt will "bolster the country's ability to pay [future Social Security] obligations." Just because President Clinton has demagogued this issue in pursuit of his big-government agenda doesn't mean there's not an element of truth underlying what he is saying. Here's that element: By law, Social Security surpluses must be used to buy federal securities. If the federal current account is in "deficit," the Social Security trust buys its securities from the U.S. Treasury. If the current account is in balance or a surplus, the trust will buy securities from the public. (That reduces the quantity of federal securities in circulation, which Frum decries.) In both cases, when benefit payments come to exceed tax revenues, federal securities held in the trust will be sold to make up the shortfall. Those sales will be to the public if the current account is balanced or in a deficit, and to the Treasury if the current account is then running a surplus. (When the trust fund is depleted, Social Security taxes must be raised, benefits cut, or Treasury transfers or borrowing on behalf of Social Security must be undertaken.)

There are two advantages of running a current account balance/surplus so that the current Social Security surpluses can be used to buy federal securities from the public: (1) The future national debt will be smaller than otherwise. Smaller debt service should translate to lower future tax rates. With smaller taxes required for general Treasury purposes, any increase in tax rates or federal borrowing to support future Social Security needs will be less onerous; (2) If the Treasury is still running a surplus come the time that the trust fund runs into a deficit, reductions in general tax rates at that time (to eliminate the general accounts surplus) can be used to offset whatever Social Security tax increases were deemed appropriate (in lieu of a benefits decrease).

GEORGE COMPTON
Alpine, UT

IT WOULD BE VALUABLE for David Frum to address the political discipline that might arise from paying off the debt and then making it very hard for Congress to adopt an unbalanced budget. As it is now, since we have so much debt and so many people tolerate it, it's easy to incur a little more. Congress really has no ceiling under which all the budget trade-offs have to be made. Consequently, nothing forces them to say no, and nothing forces them to set priorities on programs.

My public administration finance professor from 30 years ago argued with me that the national debt is different from other forms of debt in that it's not bad and it never has to be paid off. Of course, he was a Democrat.

DOUG LOWE
Yuma, AZ

PUBESCENT EAR CANDY

MARK GAUVREAU JUDGE'S article was political ideology masquerading as music criticism ("The End of Woodstock," Feb. 28). In his effort to promote religion and prove his thesis that some of the more vulgar elements of rock are on the wane, Judge ends up championing some of the most insipid, adolescent trends in popular music today. To portray the Backstreet Boys, Christina Aguilera, Ricky Martin, and 'N Sync as the rightful heirs of the Afro-American medium in American music is as laughable as it is insulting.

What is Judge's evidence for his argument? Well, it's because these adolescent acts (or, shall we say, their producers) churn out supposedly wholesome dance music. What Judge ignores is that the best Afro-American music—jazz—moves your feet to dance as it ignites your mind with the most sophisticated melodies, harmonies, and rhythm produced on this continent. The electronic, pre-programmed dance beats of these pre-teen acts are the antithesis of genuine swing. But, in Judge's world, I suppose we should not be concerned about the quality of music per se, so long as current popular acts further his thesis about cultural trends.

As Stanley Crouch reminds us, mastery of Afro-American music demands serious study. If Judge's favorite acts spent half as much time honing their musical skills in the woodshed as with their fashion designers and image consultants, then maybe their music would be something more than the pubescent ear candy it is.

SCOTT G. BULLOCK
Washington, DC

FIELDS'S GIFT

I CANNOT FATHOM HOW Paul Cantor can call *The Bank Dick* W.C. Fields's "masterpiece" ("W.C. Fields: The Art of Comedy," Feb. 21). Hasn't Cantor ever seen *It's A Gift*, Fields's 1934 film? The comedic effect of *It's A Gift* is arrived at through means much less heavy-handed than those employed in *The Bank Dick*. It is a much more subtle—and therefore stronger—presentation of Fieldsian humor.

Also, it is not specifically—as Cantor contends—the "American Dream" that is being debunked in Fields's work, but rather it is the aspirations and foibles of the lower-middle-class world Fields came from and was never able, really, to escape—the world of the shopkeepers, club men, small-time merchants (like his father), and ne'er-do-wells of the mostly immigrant neighborhoods of his youth.

W. BURKE
Montpelier, VT

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the weekly Standard

Engagement Threatens Taiwan

It wasn't supposed to be this way. This was to have been the year when our political controversies over U.S. engagement with China were finally put to sleep. So, at least, was the hopeful orthodoxy in American business and diplomatic circles. As recently as a few weeks ago.

The pressure of U.S.-led, international free-marketry would continue to loosen Beijing's authoritarian grip on the Chinese people. That process would rapidly accelerate with China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), and those itsy-bitsy human rights "problems" that might persist would no longer occasion embarrassing debates in Washington during annual consideration of China's tariff status, since any such review would be forbidden under WTO rules. To close this happy deal, we had only to make it through another presidential election in Taiwan on March 18—without a repeat of last time, when, in 1996, Beijing mounted that rather unfortunate missile assault on the island democracy it claims to own.

Our urge to conciliate Beijing's dictators is precisely what has emboldened them to provoke us.

And here the signs were good, we were led to believe. All three of Taiwan's major presidential candidates spent January and early February attempting to soothe the mainland—denying any interest in permanent, formal independence. Deputy U.S. Secretary of State Strobe Talbott then led a high-level American delegation intended to underscore the point: Nothing about the forthcoming Taiwanese vote need alarm or offend the Chinese, and no anticipatory Chinese military growling would be necessary or helpful. Talbott left Beijing February 18 all smiles and thumbs up. Things had gone "very well," he said. "The tone has been excellent. Substantively, they've been very serious."

The last conceivable hurdle was about to be jumped, in other words, and engagement's grand-prize gift to the People's Republic—WTO-mandated, permanently reduced U.S. trade barriers—could soon be delivered. At which point a grateful, democratizing, peace-loving China would surely invite American businessmen to make squillions of dollars there for the rest of time.

Yes, well: What fantastic nonsense all this always was. The fact that the entire project was supposed to be conducted with a China under extended Communist rule should alone have been enough—long, long ago—to reveal engagement as a fruitless, dangerous, and dishonorable dream.

There has remained the inescapable reality, for one thing, that China is the largest and most powerful despotism in the world. Ever since the Clinton administration reopened friendly relations with China in 1994 and made a fetish of bilateral trade, American corporations have been busy on the ground there, presumably evangelizing capitalist liberty all the while. And yet Beijing has not "democratized." No, instead—engagement theory be damned—Beijing has cracked down on its democracy activists and other alleged "subversives" more savagely than at any time since the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989.

In late February, as quietly as it possibly could, the State Department released its required annual human rights report on China. In a typically matter-of-fact and deadpan tone, the document exhaustively establishes that Chinese communism's "poor human rights record deteriorated markedly throughout the year" in 1999. An internal security assault on vocal critics of the regime "broadened and intensified" and "almost all dissident activity effectively was halted." Censorship of the press and suppression of unauthorized religious worship increased. And government-engineered "extrajudicial killings," "torture," "forced confessions," "arbitrary arrest," "incommunicado detention," and "denial of due process" were "widespread and well-documented."

Communists, who cannot justify their dictatorial rule except by appeal to "stability," must inevitably behave this way: constantly inventing new "instabilities"—and crushing them. And China's Communists will inevitably *continue* to behave this way. Already this year, for example, Beijing has made permanent 1999's "Strike Hard" campaign against the Falun Gong sect and swept up several thousand more practitioners. At least two of them are known to have

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been murdered last month. In Shandong province, police beat a 60-year-old woman to death with their bare hands. Also in Shandong, "hospital workers" forced a feeding tube down the throat of a hunger striker, rupturing his trachea and lungs—so that he drowned in his own blood.

Sad to say, the American pro-engagement elite, though it will ritually cluck a disapproving tongue when pressed, has never been much moved by abuses like these. Trade profits are more important than some old-lady religious weirdo in Shandong. However many thousands of police-state victims just like her there might be. Which attitude is what makes engagement so dishonorable.

What makes engagement positively dangerous, however, is the policy's persistent inability to recognize its own complicity in a form of Chinese thuggery reluctantly conceded, even by the engagers, to be unignorable. The People's Republic is not just a domestic despotism, after all. It is a militarily aggressive state. And Chinese military threats directed against Asian democracies allied with the United States are alarming, everyone must admit. Military threats against Taiwan, to cite the most recent and obvious example.

Washington is now suddenly concerned—even the Clinton administration and the U.S.-China Business Council—that on February 21, just after waving a poker-faced, chummy good-bye to Strobe Talbott, Beijing issued a "white paper" on Taiwan in which the mainland promised to invade and absorb that island if Taipei's current "authorities" so much as drag their feet on negotiations for reunification. There was no *reason* for such nervous-making belligerence, our amazed diplomatic-industrial complex worries. It worries that China's saber-rattling might prompt Senate passage of the largely symbolic Taiwan Security Enhancement Act—because that would annoy Beijing. Our engagement priesthood worries more that invasion talk might pressure the Pentagon into providing the badly outgunned Taiwanese with a modest few advanced defensive systems—because that would *really* annoy Beijing.

And the bipartisan Washington establishment worries most of all that China's latest threat against Taiwan will produce sufficient congressional alarm to kill a pending bill on Beijing's permanent most-favored-nation trade status—and thus destroy engagement's principal object: the WTO. That would be awful. So to save its fondest commercial dreams, American Sinophilia's shocked leadership is now desperate to calm China down. Somehow.

Yet we cannot actually calm China down. And we have no just cause to be surprised at its military provocations. And our urge to conciliate Beijing's dictators is precisely what has emboldened them to issue those provocations in the first place.

Truth be told, to anyone who had been reading the Beijing and Hong Kong newspapers, there was nothing new—neither mood nor meaning—in China's Taiwan white paper. Late last fall, China approved a multi-year military budget that targets more than half its spending on potential hostilities across the Straits of Taiwan. In early December, defense minister Chi Haotian told China's Military Command College that "war is inevitable" with Taiwan; "we cannot avoid it." A short time after that, president Jiang Zemin instructed the Communist party's political bureau that "mobilizing the armed forces to settle the Taiwan issue" was the nation's highest priority. Weeks before the "shocking" white paper was released, China's navy practiced a submarine blockade of the straits; its air force engaged in large-scale "surprise-attack sea-crossing" exercises; and Jiang began giving speeches announcing his refusal to "wait" any longer for reunification diplomacy. China must—and will—"liberate" Taiwan, its president proclaimed. It's right there in the public record.

The question whether this is all just bluster—and it might not be—is of more than passing significance, of course. But either way, the lesson of this crisis will be the same. China threatens Taiwan not in response to some international slight or challenge, but simply because it feels it *needs* to. It cannot cotton one of its "provinces" existing and flourishing as a democracy, which altogether explodes the notion that China and freedom are incompatible. Then, too, China needs regularly to unsettle Washington. Just as an insecure Communist regime must constantly battle imagined domestic instability, so it must constantly foment tension with equally imaginary regional and global enemies—the better to excuse, as necessary, its frozen hold on power. Sino-U.S. relations are periodically roiled because China wants them to be roiled. And for no other reason.

The Clinton administration, locked in the circular logic of engagement theory, does not see the game for what it is. To the president and his advisers, the Taiwan white paper will be cause to placate Beijing anew, to make nice, to talk the problem away. And do nothing else. Then things might temporarily return to "normal," sure. But at some point in the not-too-distant future—guaranteed—Chinese communism, requiring yet another emergency of "national sovereignty" to justify its rule, will do it all again. Next time the "shock" will be more severe. Having met so little previous resistance, Beijing will be forced to up the ante in order to achieve the same effect.

If this cycle continues uninterrupted, Washington may one day wake up to a war in Asia which our undeniable security interests and commitment to democracy will oblige us to join. That shouldn't and needn't happen. But the Clinton administration is helpless to prevent it—by design. So it will fall to Congress to impose long-overdue, meaningful penalties on China for this latest in a long series of outrages. Passage of the Taiwan Security Enhancement Act and rejection of Beijing's bid for permanent normal trade relations would be a good place to start.

—David Tell, for the Editors

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George W. Bush's Catholic Problem

He actually planned to court them, but may have inadvertently alienated them. BY FRED BARNES

LAST SEPTEMBER, 23 Catholics trekked to Austin, Texas, for two hours of conversation with Gov. George W. Bush. The group included Bill Donohue of the Catholic League, Father Robert A. Sirico of the Acton Institute, and Deal Hudson, editor of *Crisis*, the conservative Catholic magazine. Few were committed Bush supporters, and some of the questioning was rough. But when Hudson read a list of things they'd like Bush to do if elected president—sign a ban on partial-birth abortion, seek to outlaw third trimester abortions, stop any federal money for abortions—Bush said these were "no-brainers." And he went further, promising to appoint a pro-life ambassador to the United Nations to fight against abortion as a population control measure. The group left delighted with Bush.

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

This may have been the high point of Bush's wooing of conservative Catholics. After the meeting, "the word went out that Bush was solidly pro-life," says Hudson, who coordinates Bush's informal Catholic advisory group. "He understood his policy of compassionate conservatism and his emphasis on faith-based institutions was fundamentally in line with Catholic social teaching. He understood subsidiarity." For those who aren't familiar with that last concept, it holds, in the words of Pope John Paul, that social needs "are best understood and satisfied by people who are closest to them."

From the embryonic days of the Bush presidential campaign, conservative Catholic voters have been a major target, viewed by Bush strategist Karl Rove as a key to winning the White House in 2000. Neither Bush nor Rove has talked publicly about a Catholic strategy. But they have one, and it's being pursued more eagerly than ever now in the wake of Bush's visit to Bob Jones University and John McCain's effort to link Bush to the school's anti-Catholicism. "Bush is on notice he must not take Catholics for granted," says pollster Steve Wagner, an expert on Catholic voting patterns.

The Rove strategy was designed to reverse the slow drift of Catholics away from the Republican party. In 1984, Ronald Reagan won a majority of Catholics, the first GOP presiden-

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tial candidate to achieve this. But since then, Republicans have lost Catholic voters in two steps. First, George Bush, father of George W., "took a big hit among active Catholics in 1988," says Wagner. He won the presidency anyway. But he lost a huge bloc of inactive Catholics—that is, occasional Mass attenders—in 1992 to Ross Perot, and thus was not reelected.

Bob Dole regained some Catholic votes in 1996, but not as a result of anything he did. At one point in the campaign, Dole was urged to meet with Cardinal O'Connor of New York City. He declined. "By and large, Republicans have not recovered the numbers [among Catholics] that Reagan had," says Wagner. This also applies to congressional races. Republicans captured 53 percent of Catholic voters in 1994, but they haven't done as well since. In 1998, Democratic candidates won 53 percent of Catholics in House races.

To attract Catholics, George W. Bush recognized he would have to ease their historic suspicion of Republicans, particularly on economic issues. According to Wagner, many Catholics regard Republicans as too materialistic and insufficiently concerned about losers in the marketplace and the poor. And even conservative Catholics tend to be far less anti-government than most Republicans. Bush's response to their leeriness? Compassionate conservatism and government's use of religious organizations to aid the needy. Says Wagner: "Compassionate conservatism is perfectly designed to appeal to Catholics."

Maybe so, but Bush began to de-emphasize it when pressed by McCain in the GOP primaries. In Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina, he talked up his tax cut plan and his more conventional conservative positions. Then came the Bob Jones fiasco. When Bush spoke at the school on February 2, the day after losing the New Hampshire primary, he had no idea his visit would become a drag on his candidacy and a threat to his Catholic strategy. As he noted in a nationally televised debate on March 2, Bob Jones had become a regular stopping place for Republicans, including Reagan and his father. None of their visits became controversial, despite the well-known hostility to Catholicism by officials of the school.

Once McCain began attacking him for failing to chastise Bob Jones for its view of Catholics, however, Bush had a problem. To make matters worse, the McCain campaign started what it dubbed a "Catholic voter alert." In targeted phone messages, Catholics were told of Bob Jones's history of anti-Catholicism and of Bush's appearance. At the least, the phone calls suggested Bush is soft on sworn enemies of the Catholic church. Bush was indignant about McCain's criticism, but slow to answer. By February 20, the day after the South Carolina primary, Bush's Catholic advisers—who had proved unable to stop the growing sense of grievance among the bishops and Catholic voters—were urging Bush to respond. But it took nearly a week for Bush to dispatch a letter to Cardinal O'Connor expressing regret over not upbraiding Bob Jones for anti-Catholic bias. A missed opportunity, he called it.

The question now is whether Bush still has a chance to gain new support among Catholics. In other words, is his original Catholic strategy realistic, post-Bob Jones? Bush advisers think so. Others aren't so sure. Vin Weber, who's advising McCain, says Bush has "a Catholic problem" that's worse than he realizes. Weber, a Catholic, says Bush has "the basis" for appealing to Catholics on issues, but lacks an understanding of "what Catholicism is all about." In the end, Bush may need to pick a Catholic running mate, Weber says. That goes beyond the Bush strategy, but it might work. Too bad John McCain isn't Catholic. ◆

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Broadcasting While Black

As president, Gore would revive a notorious racial preference program. BY TERRY EASTLAND

AP/Wide World Photos

LAST MONTH'S DEBATE at the Apollo Theater in Harlem remains one of the more ill-covered campaign events, not least because the press failed to notice that, on a key policy question, Al Gore moved to the left of not only Bill Bradley but also Bill Clinton. The moment came early in the debate after a sharp exchange in which Bradley zinged Gore for supporting, 20 years ago in the House, legislation that protected the tax-exempt status of racially discriminatory private schools. Claiming Bradley had misrepresented his votes, Gore quickly changed the subject.

"Now let me . . . talk about a more recent vote," the vice president said. "In 1995 you were the only Democratic senator to vote against affirmative action to help expand the number of African American-owned broadcasting outlets—radio stations and TV stations. Why did you . . . vote against that?" Declining to answer, Bradley instead tried to hand Gore copies of the measure he had voted for. But Gore ignored him and again asked Bradley to explain his vote. Bradley never did, but conceded he had voted "against that amendment," adding that Bill Clinton had signed it into law.

The press failed to analyze this exchange, and instead glossed over the disagreement—and most of the issues for that matter—with superficial sports and entertainment metaphors. With few exceptions, Gore's vote 20 years ago and Bradley's vote in 1995 were regarded as old news. No one, so far as I could tell, reported the fact that Gore actually stated an intention to change public policy. "One of the changes that I would seek," he said, "is to repeal the measure that Senator Bradley supported." In other words, Gore wants to restore the status quo ante.

This was news—and still is. The measure Bradley supported was House Resolution 831, one of the first bills enacted in 1995 by the new Republican Congress. The law increased and made permanent a health insurance deduction for self-employed individuals that had expired in 1993. This was a popular tax break and enjoyed strong bipartisan support. What was controversial about the resolution, however, was that its tax break would be paid for, in part, by ending another tax break—the Federal Communications Commission's tax-certificate program.

Under this program, devised in 1978, a company selling a media property to a "minority-led investor group" could indefinitely defer paying taxes on the profit from the sale. The stated purpose of the policy was not to help the sellers—usually big, rich companies—though it obviously did that, but to increase the number of racial minorities in the broadcast media and, it was theorized, the different programming they could offer. There was never any good evidence to support this theory, and it clearly indulged the racialist stereotype which holds that there are such things as minority and non-minority viewpoints—that, to put it bluntly, thinking itself is a function of skin color. In practice, of course, many minority buyers were able to pay discounted prices for their new properties, and more than a few of them decided to make big bucks quickly by immediately turning around and selling at full market price to large, non-minority-owned companies. Over the years, the FCC issued 330 of these tax certificates (costing taxpayers around $2 billion). In those sales, buyers included blacks, Hispanics, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Asians, and Pacific Islanders—the officially favored groups. Obviously, someone lacking the "right" race could not be a buyer in one of these transactions: The program was discriminatory.

For lots of reasons, the tax-certificate program was politically vulnerable. After the Apollo Theater debate, Bradley said he had voted against it because it was bad tax policy. But what actually carried the 1995 resolution that killed the program was the news that Viacom, then the world's second largest media conglomerate,

Terry Eastland is publisher of the American Spectator.

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would receive as much as a $1 million tax break by selling its cable television systems to a partially minority-owned company. (It did not help that the company buying from Viacom was led by a man who, as the FCC's general counsel in 1978, had helped craft the tax-certificate program and had since benefited from four similar deals.) The House passed the resolution by a vote of 381 to 44, and the Senate cleared it by a voice vote.

Clinton, reeling from the Republicans' historic capture of Congress, proved unable to modify the legislation as it moved along. In signing the bill on April 11, he expressed regret over the demise of the race-based program. Since then, however, Clinton has not proposed its resurrection. Within his administration, of course, there are those who liked the policy—among them Gore confidants Bill Richardson, the secretary of energy who was a member of Congress in 1995 and voted against ending the program, and William Kennard, the FCC chairman. But the FCC has not tried to reestablish the program through clever rule-making. "Congress," a commission spokeswoman told me, "would need to act." Gore's statement at the Apollo means that as president he would ask Congress to do just that: pass legislation that would revive the program.

Gore's position—in favor of reviving racial favoritism at the FCC—puts him squarely at odds with his New Democrat friends.

Gore's position puts him squarely at odds with his New Democrat friends. Soon after the tax-certificate program was ended, Will Marshall of the Progressive Policy Institute, in an analysis of affirmative action policy, wrote that "it was time for Congress to end the [preferential devices] the Federal Communications Commission uses to encourage minority and female-owned business in telecommunications." Indeed, that statement placed PPI to the right of the Republican Congress, which took aim only at the FCC's tax-certificate program, leaving other such FCC programs alone. "There's little evidence," Marshall continued, "that such preferences have achieved their stated purpose of promoting 'minority views' in broadcasting; the content of broadcasting is determined by what people want to see and hear, not by the complexion or sex of company owners."

Neither George W. Bush nor John McCain seems to have noticed what Gore said in support of the tax-certificate program and the opportunity it offers for opening a debate on government programs that count and reward—and inevitably discriminate—by race. "To date," a Bush cam-

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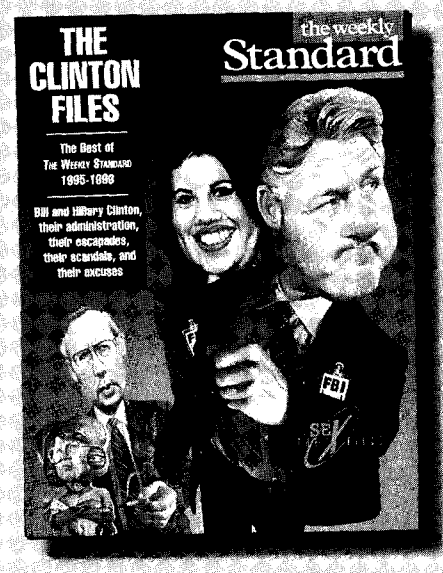

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paign spokesman said, "he has taken no position."

McCain voted for the 1995 resolution out of concern, his office told me, that rich companies which didn't deserve tax breaks were using minorities as front men to get even richer. But, given McCain's support of similar legislation, whether he could distinguish his position from Gore's in a presidential matchup is an open question.

Last summer McCain cosponsored the Telecommunications Ownership Diversification Act, which looks suspiciously like the program he voted against. It would allow a seller to defer the tax on the profit from the sale of a telecommunications business to a "historically underrepresented" group. McCain's office says the program he contemplates would not share the preferential features of the old tax-certificate program, and it is being sold on the Hill as race- and sex-neutral. But the devil is in the details. The bill's subsections say that eligible purchasers include not only any taxpayer who is "a United States citizen," which would seem to exhaust the possibilities, but also any taxpaying United States citizen who is "a woman," a "Black or African American," "a Latino or Hispanic American," "an Asian American, a native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander," or "an American Indian, Alaskan Indian, an American Eskimo, or Aleut." And McCain's bill requires the Commerce and Treasury departments to set eligibility requirements that take into account an underrepresented group's historic inability to secure capital.

Anyone who knows how the executive agencies work will realize that such provisions are sufficient to permit preferential treatment that can often be hard to identify, much less challenge. For his part, the FCC's Kennard likes what he sees. Applauding McCain's bill upon its introduction, Kennard said, "A reinvigorated tax-certificate program is a sensible way to allow all small businesses to compete in the most dynamic sector of our economy." ♦

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Stalin's New American Apologists

Communism gets a kinder, gentler makeover from academics. BY JACOB HEILBRUNN

When the Soviet Union went under, Russian historians and citizens' movements began to confront Communist crimes. Mass graves were unearthed. New documents pointing to Lenin's culpability were uncovered. In Western Europe, as well, the recent publication of *The Black Book of Communism* and François Furet's *The Passing of an Illusion* has marked a major shift, even a revision, in traditionally lenient attitudes toward Stalinism. While these books' likening of communism to Nazism created a vigorous debate, no one challenged their indictments, let alone sought to defend Stalinism.

The United States, however, is a different story. As one might expect, the *Nation* ran a hostile review of *The Black Book* and declared Furet's book worthless. But an even more vigorous denunciation of the works has now appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*. The reviewer, UCLA history professor J. Arch Getty, offers a telling example of how revisionists continue to tart up old myths about communism. Getty's novelty is to portray Stalinism almost as a powerful interest group that pulled America in a progressive direction: "Labor reform in the West in the past century," he explains, "came about under the threat of a radicalized international labor movement protected and supported by the USSR. Social goals that are commonplace today, including women's rights and racial integration, were planks of the Communist party platform long before mainstream American parties took them seriously."

Jacob Heilbrunn is a writer in Washington, D.C.

Getty exemplifies the new revisionism that has taken hold in Soviet studies; rather than deny outright Stalin's crimes, it seeks to justify them. This kind of revisionism would be condemned—indeed, it would be a career-killer—if its subject were Nazism, but it continues to be rewarded and acclaimed in the field of Soviet studies. Getty, for instance, is not some junior faculty member trying to make a name for himself, but a member of the board of Yale University Press's important Annals of Communism series, with access to, and control over, important Moscow archives.

Black Book of Communism

This is progress? Starving Russian children, 1921

Revisionism first took hold in the 1970s, when a younger generation of academics shaped by the Vietnam war dismissed as Cold War propaganda the notion that the Soviet Union was totalitarian. Stephen F. Cohen launched the first revisionist onslaught in 1973 with a biography of Bolshevik leader Nikolai Bukharin, which claimed that had the more moderate Bukharin only triumphed over Stalin, socialism could have flourished without terror. Before long, a more aggressive breed of debunkers sought to relieve Stalin of responsibility for the purges and show trials of the 1930s. By 1986, even Cohen, writing in the *Russian Review*, worried that his fellow revisionists were "clos[ing] one or both eyes to a major dimension of social reality—the prolonged mass terror of the Stalin years." Soviet scholar Peter Kenez was less politic: The revisionist's "choice of subject matter reminds one of a historian who chooses to write an account of a shoe factory operating in the death-camp of Auschwitz. He uses many documents, and he does not falsify the material . . . [but] he does not notice the gas chambers."

Perhaps no revisionist fit this description better than Getty, who had earned his revisionist stripes with a 1979 dissertation in which he claimed that Stalin had not been directly responsible for the great terror. Instead, local officials had spun out of control, and "many thousands (perhaps even hundreds of thousands) of people were unjustly arrested, imprisoned, and sent to labor camps, and thousands were executed." Getty complained that historians' reliance on the accounts of death-camp survivors had grossly distorted the Stalinist record. Victims of the terror, he felt, were not reliable witnesses: The "dominant tendency . . . has been automatically to believe anything an émigré asserted while automatically denying the truth of everything from the Stalinist side." He argued that Robert Conquest's *The Great Terror* could not be trusted because he may have "accepted payment from British intelligence agencies." Conquest's work is now considered to be a landmark history of the Stalinist purges.

Once Gorbachev and other Soviet officials began to face up to Stalinist crimes, Getty and other revisionists upped the death toll slightly but still maintained that Stalin had simply

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been unable to control an overzealous bureaucracy. In *The Road to Terror*, a new book of documents on Stalinism that appeared under the auspices of Yale's Annals of Communism, Getty and co-editor Oleg Naumov dismiss the notion of a Stalinist "terror machine," arguing that the secret police felt embattled. And they search for parallels that they think let Stalin off the hook, but actually read like a parody of Communist propaganda: "Both colonial America and Stalinist Russia had bureaucratic constituencies and popular masses who went along with the bloodletting and who thought it right and even proper."

In his treatment of *The Black Book*, Getty dispenses with any scholarly throat-clearing. It's absurd to pin the blame for mass murder on Communist ideology, he insists, because unlike Nazi death camps, Stalin's camps "were planned components of the Soviet economy, designed to provide a stable slave-labor supply and to populate forbidding territories forcibly with involuntary settlers." This is a distinction without a difference. Millions of religious and ethnic minorities, merchants, peasants, and (after the Second World War) returning POWs were murdered in Stalin's camps. Does it matter that some of them were worked to death rather than gunned down? Getty goes on to play the numbers game: From 1934 until Stalin's death, "more than a million perished in the gulag camps." But more than a million, of course, could be 40 million, which is probably about the number murdered by Stalin. Perhaps Getty's most audacious claim is that "on the international scene the Soviet Union provided support for Nelson Mandela and other reformers." Like that great reformer Mengistu, whose man-made famine murdered millions in Ethiopia? Like Fidel Castro?

"Why are we seeing books like these now, when communism is gone and there are no more dragons to slay?" Getty asks. But revisionism is rampant. Two years ago, Yale denied Vladimir Brovkin's proposal for a three-volume project on the Gulag because board members complained of, among other things, its "excessively 'anti-Bolshevik' tone." Sheila Fitzpatrick, who teaches at the University of Chicago and who is also a member of the Yale Annals of Communism board, observes in her book *Everyday Stalinism*, of what was probably the most murderous regime ever: "mostly it was a hard grind, full of shortages and discomfort." Rather like the Great Depression, one gathers. Robert W. Thurston, in the introduction to *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia* (Yale), notes that "this book argues that Stalin was not guilty of mass first-degree murder from 1934 to 1941 and did not plan or carry out a systematic campaign to crush the nation. This view is not one of absolution. . . . This fear-ridden man reacted, and overreacted, to events. All the while, he could not control the flow of people within the country, job turnover or illegal acts by managers." Which makes the ruthless dictator sound like a small business owner trying to comply with immigration law.

But wait, there's more. In the recent textbook *Russia: A History*, Brandeis professor Gregory L. Freeze writes that Stalin "extinguished large numbers of people . . . more prophylactically than purposefully." In the same volume, Michigan State professor Lewis Siegelbaum, whose chapter is titled "Building Stalinism," declares that while some workers "succumbed to industrial accidents . . . many others became true Soviet patriots."

Thus Getty's question is answered: If we are seeing more works on the crimes of Lenin, Stalin, and their successors, well, there are indeed still dragons to slay. If the work of Getty and Co. in sanitizing the record of one of the most murderous tyrants in history is any indication, the number of dragons is increasing. In the United States, at least, and especially in the most prestigious academic outposts, illusions about communism are alive and kicking. ♦

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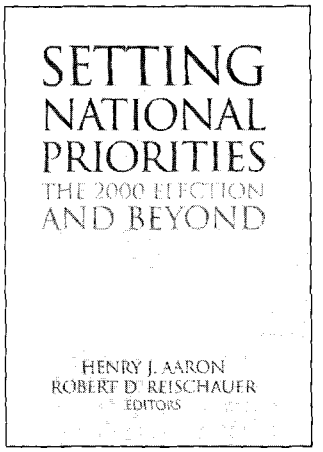

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Ending Ed Policy As We Know It

Are Republican senators up to the task?

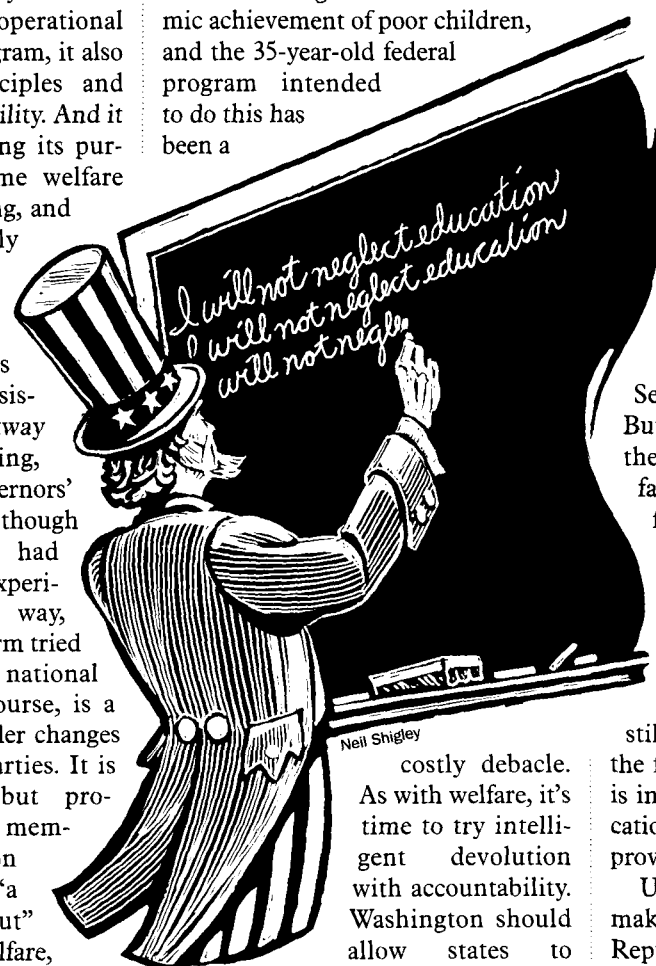
BY CHESTER E. FINN JR. AND NINA SHOKRAII REES

CAN CONGRESS do for education in 2000 what it did for welfare in 1996? We'll know a lot more this week.

Welfare reform not only ceded to the states quite a lot of operational control over a federal program, it also established strong principles and benchmarks for accountability. And it seems to be accomplishing its purpose. Millions of onetime welfare recipients are now working, and what was once a tragically counterproductive program is beginning to succeed.

Welfare reform was enacted in the teeth of resistance from most Beltway interest groups—including, notably, the National Governors' Association (NGA). Even though individual governors had launched the state-level experiments that showed the way, their collective lobbying arm tried to block a sweeping national reform. The NGA, of course, is a staff-run outfit whose leader changes every year, alternating parties. It is not only bipartisan, but programmed to cater to its members' lowest common denominator. It was "a major obstacle throughout" the struggle to revamp welfare, says reform guru Robert Rector. It opposed work requirements and, "at critical junctures, . . . actually worked against devolution of authority to the states." Today, the same dynamic is impeding education reform.

The great national challenge in K-12 schooling is to boost the academic achievement of poor children, and the 35-year-old federal program intended to do this has been a costly debacle. As with welfare, it's time to try intelligent devolution with accountability. Washington should allow states to behave like giant charter schools, freeing them to spend their federal dollars as they judge best, in return for demonstrated gains in student learning. Fifteen governors, seven state school superintendents, and a number of congressional Republicans are supporting a plan to accomplish this, known on Capitol Hill as "Straight A's." The House of Representatives actually passed a 10-state pilot version of Straight A's in October.



Neil Shigley

But the NGA doesn't like it. In the name of compromise and consensus, the governors' association is promoting a watered-down alternative that fails to offer states either real freedom or clear rules of accountability—call it "Straight C's" (craven, conventional, cumbersome). Criticized by true leaders in education reform, like Florida governor Jeb Bush and Virginia's James Gilmore, as well as Arizona's crusading superintendent of public instruction, Lisa Graham Keegan, the NGA plan would increase the authority of the secretary of education to tell governors what to do—exactly what Straight A's is meant to reverse.

We are encouraged by reports that Senate education committee Republicans will offer a pilot Straight A's amendment this week as they prepare to debate the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). But even if they succeed in passing their amendment, the bill itself, as fashioned by chairman James Jeffords, remains pervasively influenced by the NGA's tepid, salami-slicing approach to "reform."

What makes this especially deplorable is that in this election year, the voters say they care mightily about schools—but still trust the Democrats more. For the first time, a Republican Congress is in charge of the major federal education programs. This is its chance to prove Republicans can fix them.

Unfortunately, education policymaking has never come naturally to Republicans in Washington. Ever since Lyndon Johnson rammed ESEA through Congress in 1965, Democrats have championed and expanded it—to the point where it now incorporates some 60 federal programs, at an annual cost of $13.8 billion. But ESEA hasn't worked as intended. Historian Maris Vinovskis of the University of Michigan notes that, after spending "more than $150

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billion on . . . compensatory education services, we still do not know which practices and programs are particularly effective." Johnson's dream of closing the achievement gap between rich and poor remains a proper national goal, but the programs he devised seem unable to attain it.

In the present legislative cycle, Republicans should break decisively with that history. Unlike the old GOP block grants, which empowered states but did nothing by way of accountability, Straight A's promotes state autonomy while demanding results in return for federal money, much as welfare reform does. And Straight A's forces nothing on states. As in the early days of welfare reform, the basic structure of federal education programs would remain intact, but governors could enter into contractual agreements with the federal government, promising to boost the academic achievement of their students, especially low-income students, in exchange for freedom from red tape.

Instead of embracing Straight A's, however, Republican senators are prepared to give it a peck on the cheek while hugging Straight C's to their bosoms. A gaggle of GOP moderates and education committee aides apparently haven't noticed that the NGA is killing a terrific opportunity to make a change that the country needs. Neither they nor the governors—30 of whom are Republicans—seem to see that the NGA is the wrong group to put in charge of the education agenda. It consists of Beltway insiders who intend to "get along" and so remain where they are for years to come. That's precisely the attitude that has made people sick of Washington—and that emboldened governors to launch their education reforms in the first place.

Everyone we asked to explain the mysterious appeal of Straight C's agreed on the answer: It's bipartisan. But bipartisanship is curious. It seems to become a virtue in Washington only when Republicans would otherwise do things their way. Nowhere is this clearer than in education policy, where the GOP was marginalized for three decades. The current NGA infatuation with bipartisanship in federal policy is a criterion that would stop many of its members dead in their tracks when it comes to reforming education in their own states. Why is bipartisanship something the Senate leadership now covets? Did consensus produce the bold experiments that led to welfare reform?

As long as no one can show that Washington's approach to education is bringing improvements, Uncle Sam should be humble, experimental, and encouraging of states that yearn to try something different—on condition that they produce results. Straight A's would do for education what reform did for welfare. It would be nice if its appeal were bipartisan, but that is no litmus test for sound policy—and it certainly isn't good politics for Republicans. ♦

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The Politics of Creative Destruction

McCain's challenge to an ossified Republican establishment reveals the outlines of a potential governing majority.

By William Kristol and David Brooks

There aren't many concepts as beloved by conservatives as the great economist Joseph Schumpeter's notion of creative destruction. Capitalism is superior to socialism because it is dynamic: Old forms and structures have to change or give way—or be destroyed—so new ones can prosper. Government shouldn't get in the way and try to prop up faltering businesses and industries. But Schumpeter's concept doesn't apply only to economics. It applies to politics as well.

These days it applies to the Republican party. To stay with business terminology, the Republican party has been losing market share. In 1984, Ronald Reagan beat Walter Mondale by 18 points. In 1988, George Bush beat Dukakis by 8 points. Four years later Bush lost to Bill Clinton by 5 points and four years after that, Bob Dole lost to Clinton by 8 points. On the congressional level, the Republican party had a great anti-Clinton triumph in 1994, but failed to translate it into a governing conservatism. The Gingrich revolution petered out, and the GOP lost seats in each of the last two congressional elections.

Just as important, the party has been losing ground on policy matters. The Democrats essentially set the agenda for the last Congress, with issues like the minimum wage hike and the patients' bill of rights. Pathetically, Republicans were left to boast, in their response to the president's State of the Union address, that they want to spend $500 million more on the Department of Education than Bill Clinton asked for. Survey data make it clear that voters trust the Democratic party to address key issues like education, health care, crime, and the economy more than they trust the Republican party. And over the last few years, the Democratic party has reopened a lead over the GOP in party identification.

If the Republican National Committee called in a team from McKinsey, the consultants would say it's not terribly surprising that the Republican party should be faltering. The GOP has been following a strategy laid out over a quarter century ago, back when Sears and GM and AT&T dominated the economy. No wonder it's not working too well in the age of Yahoo! and Qualcomm.

The GOP coalition as we know it was shaped between 1964 and 1980. Religious conservatives, largely from the South, and economic libertarians, largely from the West, teamed up and took control of the GOP, overcoming—and to some degree jettisoning—the Northeastern liberals. The two ascendant groups had a common foe—big, intrusive government. In those days, New Right Republicans were the agents of creative destruction. Against a drifting and reactive GOP establishment, they stood for bold tax cuts, deregulation, and opposition to both liberal social engineering projects, such as busing, and liberal cultural projects—amnesty, acid, and abortion. They understood that to prevail they first had to challenge and even destroy what stood in their way. Ronald Reagan challenged an incumbent Republican president, Gerald Ford, in a primary fight in 1976. Jeffrey Bell defeated Republican senator Clifford Case in a primary in 1978. And Al D'Amato did the same to Jacob Javits in 1980.

And in 1980, Reagan was elected despite—or because of?—the defection of part of the old GOP establishment, in the person of liberal Republican John Anderson, who ran as a third party candidate. Conventional wisdom has it that nothing could be worse than for part of your coalition to split off and oppose you in November—and in the summer of 1980, many expected Anderson's defection to damage Reagan's chances. It didn't.

Reagan won, and created a new governing majority, bringing the now famous Reagan Democrats and independents into the fold. That majority has served the country

William Kristol is editor and publisher and David Brooks is senior editor at The Weekly Standard.

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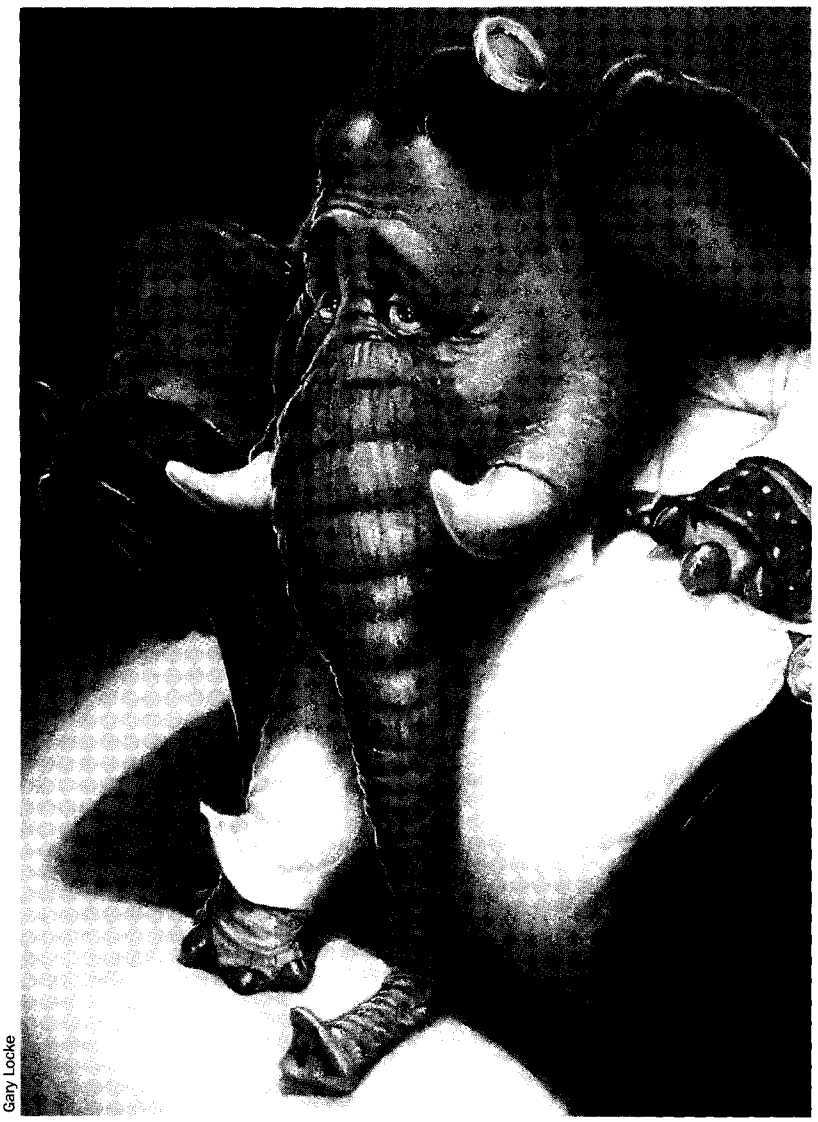

Gary Locke

ture that it is in their best interest to change, and it's also true that the destructive effects of the McCain campaign have been more evident than the creativity. But it is always that way at first. The iconoclastic phase of creative destruction comes first; only then does something new have space to bloom and prosper.

On the destructive side, McCain has run directly at two pillars of the old Republican coalition. For the past two decades, economic conservatives have championed across-the-board tax cuts. John McCain proposed more modest tax cuts, and said he'd rather pay down the debt. Two of the most prominent social conservatives of the old coalition are Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell. McCain attacked them.

On the creative side, McCain has groped his way toward two basic innovations. He would replace the old mostly libertarian attitudes toward government that characterized the "Leave Us Alone" coalition with an appeal to citizens committed to conservative reform. McCain doesn't say that government is oppressive and just needs to get out of the way. He says he wants to reform government to make us proud. He's proposed campaign finance reform, education reform, Social Security reform, a campaign against lobbyist-driven pork-barrel spending. Far from calling government an evil that needs to be dismantled, he says that public service is the noblest calling.

well. But times and issues change. Busing is gone. Crime is down. Soviet communism is dead. It's hard to argue that the country is being strangled by taxes and regulation when the economy is chugging along at nearly 7 percent growth. And though it took them three presidential defeats to do so, the Democrats finally reengineered themselves, and they started winning. In the last two presidential elections, the Republican candidates were left with about 40 percent of the vote—the Republican base and little more.

Along comes John McCain. Either by accident or by design, he has become an agent of creative destruction. He has the temperament—to say the least—to challenge the old order. He has attracted support from a diverse group of people—independents, Democrats, and reenergized Republicans—who are largely unmoved by old Republican themes. It's fair to say that the McCain campaign has done a poor job of persuading members of the old struc-

As important but less obvious, at least until last week, McCain would redirect a religiously based moral conservatism into a patriotically grounded moral appeal. When McCain talks about remoralizing America, he talks in terms of reinvigorating patriotism. As his February 28 Virginia Beach speech shows nicely, when John McCain starts talking about religious faith, he ends up talking about patriotism. This passage of the speech comes right after an anecdote from his time as a POW, when a guard who had shown the prisoner kindness identified himself as a Christian by drawing a cross in the dirt:

> That is my faith; the faith that unites and never divides; the faith that bridges unbridgeable gaps in humanity. That is my religious faith, and it is the faith I want my party to serve, and the faith I hold in my country. It is the faith that we are all equal and endowed by our Creator with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is the faith I would die to defend.

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Notice the slide from religious faith to the Declaration of Independence, from the cross to America. Similarly, in a statement Wednesday designed to reassure religious conservatives that his attack on Robertson and Falwell was not an attack on them, McCain said, "I have always welcomed the support of millions of religious conservatives who share my convictions about the greatness of America and our Judeo-Christian values." This conflation of religion and patriotism is very much in the tradition of Teddy Roosevelt and, for that matter, Ronald Reagan. It has been much less evident in the conservative rhetoric of the 1990s.

In policy terms, McCain is less likely to use government to combat sin or regulate family life. But he is more likely to use government power to combat those he thinks put private interest above America's interest. His career can be seen as a series of crusades against people McCain thinks have behaved selfishly—tobacco companies, pork-barrel spenders, special interests, overreaching federal regulators.

Electorally, the McCain majority coalition would take in the independent voters who have grown more numerous in the information age. During the 1990s, two outsiders briefly (and remarkably) led in presidential preference polls: Ross Perot in mid-1992 and Colin Powell in late 1995. As a reformer, McCain aims to be the thinking man's Perot. As a patriot, he aims to be a politically engaged Powell. The patriotic reform impulse, which flared up in 1992 and 1995, has reemerged in the McCain campaign. Even if that campaign now falls short, this sentiment could be at the heart of a new conservative governing majority.

This new majority—whether led by McCain or someone else—would include mainstream conservatives in the North and South, bicoastal independents, and the midwestern bourgeoisie. Whereas the Goldwater Republicans jettisoned the northeastern Republicans, McCain would jettison the most self-caricaturing leaders of the right. If forced to explain this in realpolitik terms, he'd probably say, you can't win the large group of swing independents needed for electoral victory unless you disavow the Robertsons and Falwells (while striving to retain the religious conservative grass roots). By framing his moral crusade as a patriotic rather than a religious movement, McCain could create an alliance between the independents and most social conservatives. He might fail this time; some of his recent rhetoric was harsh. But general election match-up polls pitting both Republicans against Gore suggest that the potential McCain majority may be the only governing majority available to conservatives.

Naturally, the people who created, or benefit from, or are simply comfortable with the old Republican order have fought bitterly to block McCain. Like all defenders of old orders, they play up the destructive side of their opponent and deny the existence of any constructive side. McCain hurts his own cause with his occasional recklessness. But that is the nature of creative destruction. It is sometimes reckless. Destruction induces anxiety before creation can inspire confidence.

Furthermore, some McCain opponents insist there is nothing wrong with the status quo Republican coalition, at least nothing so wrong that it couldn't be fixed by putting an attractive person like George W. Bush at the top.

In some ways Bush has as strong a claim to the reformer mantle as John McCain. He did achieve tort reform and education reform in Texas. But already in this campaign, he has been saddled with the old Republican coalition. If he is the nominee, Al Gore will be sure to hang its most inflammatory symbols around his neck. Bush has shown no inclination to rip out any part of the mansion he has inherited, and without that there can be no renovation.

Bush, then, is in danger of playing out the Michael Dukakis role in this election. After two presidential defeats, the Democratic party turned to a governor who attempted to run on competence, not ideology. But George Bush the elder, a sitting vice president, found it easy to slap the liberal caricature on a Democratic governor from the Northeast. Al Gore will certainly try to pin the same old right-wing tag on the southern Republican governor who spoke at Bob Jones University. It could end up taking the Republicans, as it took the Democrats, three presidential defeats before they embrace renovation.

This essay is being written a few days before Super Tuesday, when the Republican nominee will probably be determined. John McCain's candidacy could be effectively finished off on that day. But the need for a period of Republican creative destruction will not end with his defeat, any more than the need to restructure the old GOP ended with Ronald Reagan's primary defeat in 1976.

Either way, it is now clear that the Republican party has more to fear from stability than from change. Conservatives from Burke on have always emphasized that it is necessary to evolve in order to conserve. Conservatives should have the courage of their Burkean and Schumpeterian convictions. They shouldn't fear the creative destruction that is now necessary to a healthy party and movement; they should join it and shape it. ♦

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The Politics of Bifurcation

The public's conflicted view of Clinton explains a lot about the surprising Republican presidential race.

By Jeffrey Bell

The 2000 presidential campaign is surprising analysts by breaking the seemingly ironclad rules of the game, and many of its oddities are traceable to one pervasive fact: The American people hold a bifurcated view of the Clinton presidency. Since early 1998, when the Monica Lewinsky scandal erupted, a solid majority of voters have expressed personal disapproval of Clinton, while a solid majority of those same voters have continued to give the president high job approval ratings. This anomaly has remained in place through the president's impeachment by the House in December 1998, his acquittal by the Senate in February 1999, and the year of presidential politics since then.

It is the stubborn persistence of the public's conflicted view of the Clinton presidency that explains why this has been a miserable year for broad ideological agendas, whether of the right or left. It explains the electorate's unusual focus on personal rectitude and character. And it suggests why, in one of the campaign's biggest surprises, the only pro-change issue that has gained traction for any candidate is a pure "process" issue widely expected to be marginal: campaign finance reform.

After the Senate acquitted Bill Clinton, it was reasonable to expect that the president's job approval and personal approval would reconverge. It also seemed likely that his popularity would come to rest at a fairly high level, given the persistence of the encouraging national trends—low unemployment, high stock prices, budget surpluses, and sharply declining rates of welfare dependency and violent crime—that had given Clinton his high job approval in the first place.

Jeffrey Bell was senior consultant to Bauer for President 2000 and is president of Lehrman Bell Mueller Cannon, an economic and financial forecasting firm.

But the expected reconvergence of Clinton's ratings hasn't happened—with direct consequences for his designated heir. Vice President Al Gore led all comers in presidential polls throughout 1997, but abruptly lost his lead at the beginning of the Lewinsky scandal, and has never regained it.

The stunning rise of John McCain, riding an issue virtually no consultant thought would cut any ice in a Republican primary, has made it easy to forget that the emergence of the other leading Republican candidate, George W. Bush, was once almost equally surprising. To achieve his standing as the Republican front-runner—whether measured by national polls, funds raised, or endorsements—the governor of Texas also had to rewrite a rule or two.

Beginning in 1968, every "open" Republican presidential nomination has been won by a previous national candidate. The 1968 nominee, Richard Nixon, had run twice for vice president and once for president. In 1980, Ronald Reagan had two previous unsuccessful tries for the nomination behind him. The 1988 nominee, George Herbert Walker Bush, had run twice for vice president and once for president. And the 1996 nominee, Bob Dole, had run once for vice president and twice for president. Each of these men emerged as the front-runner early in the selection process, suffered a decline in the polls, and recovered to achieve the GOP presidential nomination.

In the 2000 Republican race, all that changed. The candidates with national races under their belts were Dan Quayle, Lamar Alexander, Pat Buchanan, and Steve Forbes. Three of these men had strong showings in the presidential primaries of the 1990s, and the fourth, Quayle, had been nominated twice and elected once as vice president. But each failed to get traction in the polls and in early ballot tests. All but Forbes were forced out of the race in the wake of the August 1999 Iowa straw poll.

By contrast, Bush, who had never previously sought national office, took a huge lead among GOP voters dur-

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ing 1998 and has never relinquished it. The only other Republicans who ever did well in national polling were Elizabeth Dole and McCain, marquee names in their own right but, like Bush, new to national candidacy.

Once Bush lost to McCain in three early primaries, it became tempting to write off his prior status as odds-on favorite as the product of flawed judgment on the part of GOP financial and political elites. Those elites' judgment may or may not have been flawed. But Bush took a huge lead in polls of rank-and-file voters before he had raised his first dollar or secured more than a handful of endorsements. Equally surprising, most of his rise in the national polls came in 1998, when he was seeking reelection as governor and, by his own choice, received virtually no national media coverage.

But 1998, of course, was the year of Monica, and marked the beginning of the Clinton bifurcation. At the end of that year, when national pollsters asked voters to revisit the 1996 election between Clinton and Bob Dole, Clinton still won handily. But when they asked voters to reprise the 1992 election between Clinton and President George Bush, Bush was strongly preferred.

Republican candidates admired for their prowess in high-dollar fund-raising have repeatedly underperformed once exposed to voters.

Asking voters to reassess the 1992 election, it would seem, is the equivalent of asking them whether Clinton should have been elevated to the presidency in the first place. The answer, for a majority, is no. In contrast, asking voters to reprise the Clinton-Dole election is the equivalent of asking whether the Clinton policies, once launched, should have been abandoned. The answer to that question also is no, since a majority of voters associate the president's policies with the favorable economic and social trends.

This reluctance to abandon Clinton's policies undoubtedly helps explain why impeachment remained unpopular, no matter how much evidence piled up against the president. Meanwhile, that same mounting evidence fed the growing revulsion against Clinton the man, prompting the voters, even as they resisted impeachment, to elevate in the polls a politician to whom they had had little direct exposure, but whose name happened to be George Bush.

The hypothesis, if true, also sheds light on a number of features of the subsequent 2000 election cycle. Contenders with prior experience as national candidates—especially those who had run in 1996 as (in effect) advocates of Clinton's ouster (Buchanan, Alexander, and Forbes)—failed to achieve the traction such battle-tested candidates had in earlier Republican races. The positive economic and social developments associated with Clinton's policies may have discredited these challengers in a way that never happened to the experienced Republicans who invariably dominated the competition in previous presidential cycles.

Also bucking the odds were candidates with well-defined ideological agendas different from Clinton's. This was true of conservatives like Steve Forbes and the candidate I worked for, Gary Bauer. But it also affected Bill Bradley, whose campaign began to decline as soon as he defined his candidacy in terms of such liberal "big ideas" as universal health care and universal handgun registration.

The advantage, instead, has gone to first-time candidates with a good name or an interesting biography who were not seen as militant critics of existing policies. This description fit Bush, McCain, and Elizabeth Dole (who had a high favorable rating and matched up well against the Democrats in national polls even on the day she withdrew from the race). It also fit Bradley, until he began outlining his policy differences with Clinton-Gore. It is this earlier, comparatively nonideological, phase that saw Bradley's huge, unexpected rise in polls of Democratic primary voters.

Now for some second-guessing. Assuming the basic hypothesis is true, where did George W. Bush go wrong? How could this natural beneficiary of the voters' dual sympathies—inclining them both to punish Clinton, and to refrain from disrupting his successful policies—find himself in such jeopardy on the eve of the March mega-primaries?

It is said that in the midst of a national desire to "take a shower"—clean up the government—Bush, by means of his awesome fund-raising and countless endorsements, inadvertently made himself the establishment candidate. This critique has some obvious merit. Again and again, Republican presidential candidates admired for their prowess in high-dollar fund-raising have underperformed once exposed to the voters. This was true of two earlier Texans, John Connally in 1980 and Phil Gramm in 1996. Perhaps there is something about talking to GOP financial elites that makes it harder to talk to Joe Six-pack. Bush has also been excoriated for the opposite: "moving to the right" to scoop up socially conservative voters and win the South Carolina primary.

But in retrospect, what sane adviser would have told Bush not to parlay his huge lead in the polls in 1998 into a huge war chest in 1999, or not to try to rally the party's

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conservative voters, once John McCain's appeal to moderates and independents had become plain?

Bush's biggest mistake was probably much more straightforward: He made himself look like an implacable opponent of McCain's central proposal, campaign finance reform. He went so far as to imply that reform would not be in the interest of the Republican party.

The truth is that voters have become profoundly suspicious of political fund-raising. Not only does the system as it has developed, with its strict limits on personal contributions and increasing dominance by huge blocs of "soft money," patently favor incumbents and entrenched special interests—but it is bound up with what is least appetizing in the Clinton-Gore era. In a year when fundamental policy questions are off the table, Republican opposition to fixing the campaign finance system is the central barrier to the party's benefiting from the voters' bifurcated view of Clinton. It is the barrier that shields Al Gore from his Buddhist temple.

McCain's bravery as a prisoner of war in Hanoi was a big reason for his rise. But a McCain campaign without a reform theme would not have posed a serious challenge to Gov. Bush. McCain's determination to clean up politics probably would not have looked credible without his personal story, but it is unlikely that his courage as a prisoner of war, by itself, would have cut any ice with an electorate obsessed with resolving its ambivalence about the Clinton era.

The public's bifurcated view of Clinton has made it a tough year for reviving the Reagan coalition, or making much progress toward a post-Cold War redefinition of conservatism, desirable as those aims are. But without the bifurcation, the Republicans would have far less chance than they do of retaking the White House, given the positive economic and social trends over which Bill Clinton and Al Gore preside. To make the most of these chances, Republicans—those running for Congress as well as the national ticket—should unite behind a serious plan to clean up the campaign finance system. That should not be too much for voters to ask. ♦

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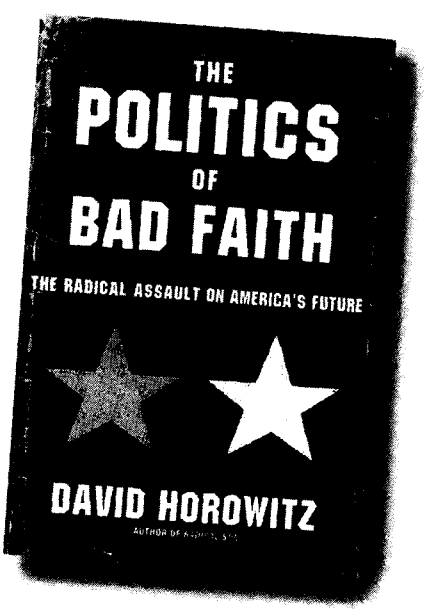

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[1] Johnston, L., Bachman, J. & O'Malley, P., National Survey Results from the Monitoring the Future Study, Vol. 1, Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office (1999), p. 270, Table 30; online version of MTF survey; Luntz Research Companies, National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse II: Teens and Their Parents, New York, NY: National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (1996). [2] Rosenbaum, Dennis, Assessing the Effects of School based Drug Education: A Six Year Multilevel Analysis of Project DARE, Abstract (1998 April 6); Ennett, S.T., et al., "How Effective Is Drug Abuse Resistance Education? A Meta Analysis of Project DARE Outcome Evaluations," American Journal of Public Health, 84: 13941401 (1994); Brown, J. H., D'Emidio Caston, M. & Pollard, J., "Students and Substances: Social Power in Drug Education," Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis (EEPA), 19, 1, (1997) pp. 6582. [3] "A Wiser Course: Ending Drug Prohibition," Report of the Committee on Drugs and the Law, The Association of the Bar of the City of New York, Volume 49, Number 5, June 1994; Steven Duke and Albert Gross, "America's Longest War," TarcherPutnam, 1993 p. 89. [4] Ambrosio, TaraJen and Vincent Schiraldi. (1997) From Classrooms to Cellblocks: A National Perspective. Washington DC: The Justice Policy Institute; National Association of State Budget Officers, 1995 State Expenditures Report, Washington D.C.: National Association of State Budget Officers (1996); Ambrosio, T. & Schiraldi, V., "Trends in State Spending, 19871995," Executive Summary February 1997, Washington D.C.: The Justice Policy Institute (1997).

Politicians that justify the War on Drugs to "protect our children" are either fools or knaves.

For more information visit: www.csdp.org.
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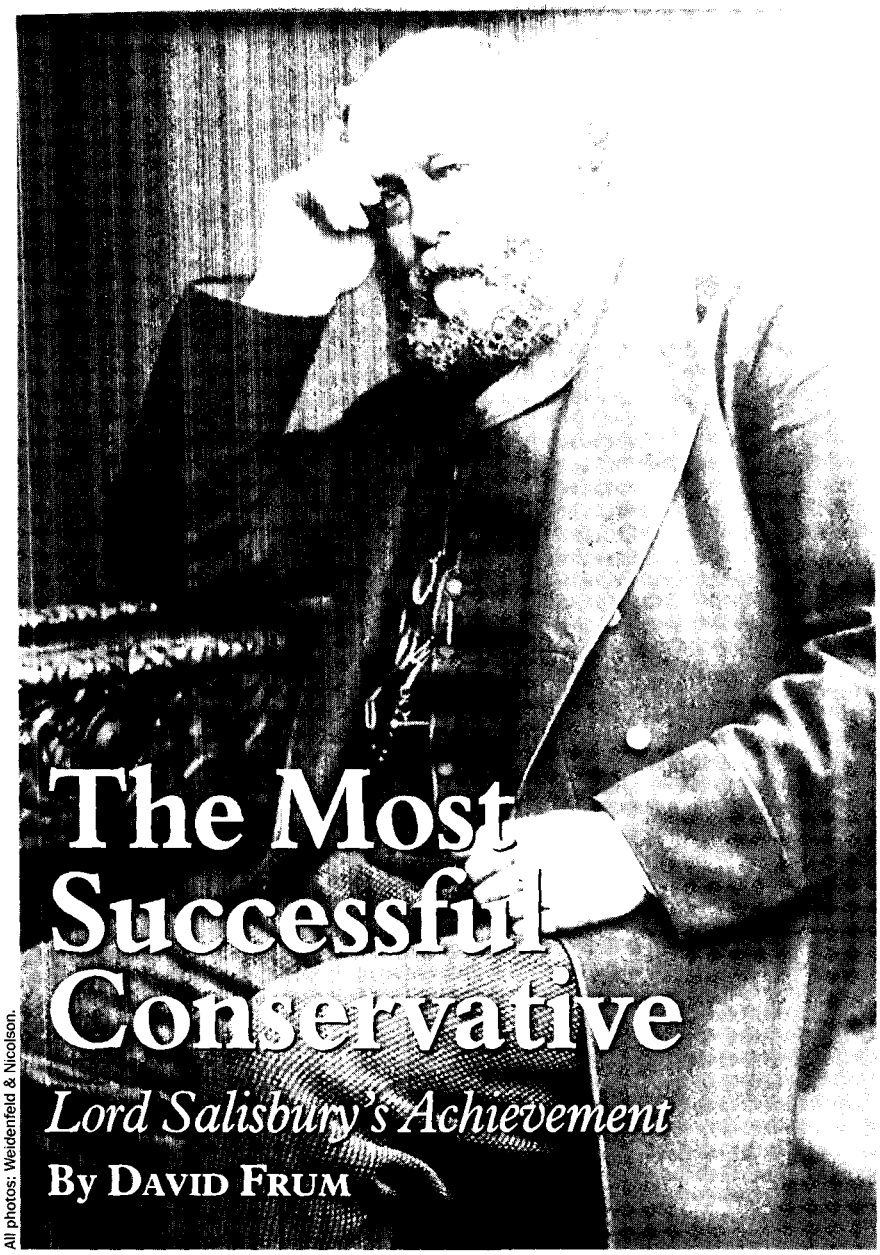

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The Most Successful Conservative

Lord Salisbury's Achievement

By David Frum

What can Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne-Cecil, third marquess of Salisbury, prime minister of Britain for most of the years from 1885 until 1902, possibly have to say to *us*? An arch-Tory who opposed almost every progressive measure introduced in Britain in his lifetime, an imperialist who annexed millions of square miles to the British Empire, a sardonic and even cynical aristocrat who mistrusted the wisdom of the people and never once fought a contested election for his seat in Parliament: It would be difficult to invent a character less in sympathy with the spirit of the new millennium. The opposite of what we call a multiculturalist, he treated even the Scots as exotic. As chancellor of Oxford University, he rebuffed demands for the admission of women. Never once did he defend a controversial policy as being for the benefit of the children. And yet, Salisbury was a politician from whom modern conservatives can learn a lot.

David Frum is a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard *and the author of* How We Got Here: The '70s: The Decade That Brought You Modern Life—for Better or Worse *(Basic Books).*

Salisbury
Victorian Titan
by Andrew Roberts
Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 938 pp., $50.

And Salisbury's newest biographer, Andrew Roberts, is just the man to drive home the lessons of his eventful career. An ardently partisan Tory, Roberts dedicated this biography of the most electorally successful Conservative prime minister of the nineteenth century to Margaret Thatcher, the most successful Conservative of the twentieth. She ought to appreciate the gesture, for *Salisbury: Victorian Titan* is a very fine book by a learned and elegant writer who, at age thirty-six, has already distinguished himself as an outstanding practitioner of the British art of non-academic history-writing. Roberts admires Salisbury and wants the reader to admire him too, but he does not skip over Salisbury's faults: a willingness to twist constitutional rules and a savage bluntness of speech that exposed a brutal, even cruel, cast of mind: "If our ancestors had cared for the rights of other people, the British Empire would not have been made," Salisbury retorted to someone who had accused him of trampling on the rights of small nations.

The future Lord Salisbury was born in 1830. He inherited one of England's most resonant names: One of his ancestors had served as chief minister to both Queen Elizabeth and James I. But the name and expensive education that went along with being the second son of a marquess were all he got.

Not that he much appreciated that education: He was savagely bullied at Eton, and made so unhappy that years later he would step into an alley to avoid encountering one of his old schoolmates in the street. Young Robert Cecil's personality was depressive to begin with, but his biographer believes that these horrible early experiences deepened his inherent gloominess and pessimism. "Whatever happens will be for the worse," the mature Salisbury would observe, "and therefore it is in our interest that as little should happen as possible." He was talking about a particular diplomatic problem in Persia, but that remark could have served as the motto of his life.

From Eton, Cecil was sent to Oxford, then on a tour of the world, and then into the House of Commons in 1853. "Sent" is the right word: The seat he represented, Stamford, had (for all practical purposes) a constituency of one voter: the marquess of Exeter, who also

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happened to belong to the Cecil clan. Robert Cecil would represent Stamford for the next fifteen years. Nobody ever wasted the time or money to challenge his hold on the seat.

At the age of twenty-seven, Cecil married an intelligent but homely girl from a middle-class family. In grand Victorian manner, his infuriated father promptly cut him off without a penny. Since MPs in those days received no pay, Cecil supported his family as an anonymous freelance journalist. Over the next eight years, he committed hundreds of thousands of often-vitriolic words to print. He defended the established church's right to collect tithes from non-Anglicans, opposed the creation of secular elementary schools, vilified all projects to extend the vote to the middle class, and championed the South in the American civil war. Then, in June 1865, his elder brother died. Suddenly the impecunious Cecil stood to inherit one of the largest fortunes in England. Not so coincidentally, he was simultaneously catapulted onto the front bench of the Conservative party. Upon his father's death in 1868, he was elevated into the House of Lords. During a cabinet crisis a decade later, he secured the all-important job of foreign secretary. At last, in the protracted and ruthless power struggle that broke out after the death of Benjamin Disraeli, Salisbury emerged by 1885 as the Conservatives' unchallenged leader.

That leadership was not much of a prize. Of the fifty-five years since Salisbury's birth, the Conservatives and their Tory predecessors had held office for only fifteen. In a Britain that was becoming ever more urban, industrial, and entrepreneurial, the Conservatives were seen as the party of rural life, agriculture, and forelock-tugging. The mid-Victorian electorate was staunchly middle class: In 1832, the franchise had been reformed to give the vote to one man out of five; in 1867, it had been extended to one man in every three. And it was the low-tax, free-trade, peace-loving, vice-suppressing Liberals, not the rustic, beer-drinking, Anglican Conservatives, who championed the interests and values of the middle class.

In 1884, the Gladstone government hammered in what it plainly saw as the last nail in the Conservatives' coffin: a third reform act. This one gave the vote to every man who owned or rented a house, more than half the male population of the country. The Liberal middle-class electorate would become an even more staunchly Liberal working-class electorate. Toffs like the marquess of Salisbury, it seemed, would shuffle off into the dust of history.

Looking back today, there is something awfully familiar about Gladstone's scheme. Just as British politics was transformed a century ago by the advent of the industrial-worker vote, so American and British politics are being transformed today by the growing importance of the votes of working mothers and nonwhite immigrants. A century ago, it seemed all but inevitable that new voters would lock in forever the supremacy of the liberal parties. Many American and British observers happily or unhappily hold the same view today. But Salisbury's cunning thwarted Gladstone's hopes, lending credence to the idea that equally imaginative leadership could achieve corresponding success for conservatism today.

Salisbury's victories in the 1880s suggest equally imaginative conservatives could achieve corresponding success now.

Salisbury saw, in 1885, two things that Gladstone missed. The first was the dynamic nature of political coalitions. Gladstone believed that by adopting redistributionist policies he could simply annex the votes of industrial workers to his existing coalition of businessmen, evangelicals, and voters from the non-English regions of Britain: Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. Salisbury perceived that this leftward jog was at least as likely to jostle Gladstone's old supporters loose, giving him an excellent chance to add the traditional, business-minded Liberal vote in the suburbs to the Conservative base in the country. The second thing Salisbury saw was that while the Liberals were speaking for the material interests of the new voters, they were dangerously neglecting their values. The new voters might be more redistribution-minded than the old. But they were no less patriotic, and under the right circumstances they might turn out to be even more so.

On the strength of those two perceptions, Salisbury proceeded to lay a trap that would shatter the Liberal coalition and rearrange British politics for a long time to come.

A little background is necessary here. The late nineteenth-century House of Commons contained six hundred and seventy members, one hundred and three of them from Ireland. That ratio overrepresented the Irish, whose share of the total British population had fallen to less than ten percent by Salisbury's time, but before 1884 nobody much cared: Most of the Irish seats were controlled by wealthy landlords and the small, disproportionately Protestant, middle class, and they split themselves much as English seats did between Conservatives and Liberals, with a slight but persistent bias in the Liberals' favor.

The adoption of the secret ballot in 1872 weakened the old regime in Ireland, and the enfranchisement of poorer voters in 1884 capsized it. It gradually dawned on all the politicians of England that the election expected in 1885 would send to Westminster a huge contingent of nationalist Irish MPs and that the Irish could very easily end up holding the balance of power.

What to do about this? Salisbury acted first: He arranged for a representative to meet secretly with the nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell in August 1885 to propose a Conservative-Parnellite pact. Roberts convincingly argues that Salisbury was not negotiating in good faith. Rather, he expected word of the talks to leak and to goad Gladstone into outbidding him with

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Eminent Victorians: Gladstone, Disraeli, and the young Lord Robert Cecil before he became the marquess of Salisbury.

promises that would please the Irish but offend the English. And that is exactly what happened.

In the elections of November 1885, the Liberals won three hundred and thirty-five of six hundred and seventy seats, while the Conservatives won two hundred and forty-nine and the Nationalists eighty-six. Gladstone could only form a government by making a deal with the Parnellites. Within days of the election, Gladstone declared himself in favor of the Parnellite demand for a separate Parliament for Ireland: Home Rule it was called. Gladstone assumed from Salisbury's clandestine discussions with Parnell that the Conservatives would not put up much of a fight, and he was taken aback when Salisbury abruptly reversed himself.

Public opinion backed Salisbury, and under the pressure of the controversy, the Liberals began to fragment. While reaching for the Irish, Gladstone loosened his grip on the English. In the climactic vote on the Home Rule bill, more than one hundred Liberals defected. Gladstone was forced to call an election in the summer of 1886, and this time he was beaten badly by Salisbury's new coalition of Conservatives and anti-Home Rule Liberals. Salisbury would go on to hold office for a total of fifteen years, longer than Gladstone himself. Salisbury retired in 1902, but his party would hold power for fifty-nine of the ninety-eight remaining years of the twentieth century.

Salisbury's Unionist formula combined vigorous self-assertion abroad with modest social reform at home. It was Salisbury's Unionists who enacted universal elementary education and who belatedly introduced elected local governments in place of the old informal system of rule by the local gentry. His Unionist government also built Britain's first public housing: a departure from laissez faire that Salisbury seems to have been able to accept by analogizing it to a seignior's moral responsibility to house the poor attached to his estate.

Abroad, Salisbury added millions of square miles to the British empire—all of modern South Africa, and most of what is now Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi as well as all of Kenya, Uganda, and the Sudan, and most of Nigeria. At the same time, his adroit diplomacy allayed the resentments and jealousies of other European powers. It was to this success in "painting the map red"—red being the cartographer's color for British territory—that Unionists owed their popularity. Defeated in 1892, they went on to win back-to-back majorities in 1895 and 1900: the first time any British party had accomplished such a thing since 1832—and the last time a party would do so, without first changing leaders, until Margaret Thatcher's reelection in 1983.

And it is in foreign affairs that Salisbury's example may have the most to say to conservatives today. Britain in the 1890s was not as strong relative to the other powers of the world as the United States is today. The United States would overtake Britain in gross output by 1900, and Germany was rapidly catching up. Britain did maintain a navy that was as powerful as any two other nations' combined. But its army was so small that Bismarck joked that if Germany were attacked by Britain, he'd call out the Prussian state police to arrest the invaders. America at the dawn of the twenty-first century, by contrast, maintains forces equal to those of the next five powers combined, paid for by an economy that is at least twice as large as that of its likeliest strategic rival, China.

Yet, the foreign policy problems that Britain faced at the end of the nineteenth century are similar to those faced by the United States today: How to deal with the ambitions of a new great power whose intentions cannot be read clearly but do not look friendly (Germany then, China now); and how to deal with one's own ambitions. "I have a strong opinion," Salisbury warned in 1898,

> that there is a danger of the public opinion of this country believing that it is our duty to take everything we can, to fight everybody, and to make a quarrel of every dispute. That seems to me a very dangerous doctrine, not merely because it might incite other nations against us . . . but there is a more serious danger. However strong you may be, whether you are a man or a nation, there is a point beyond which your strength will not go. It is madness; it ends in ruin if you allow yourself to pass beyond it.

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Salisbury's diplomacy has to be ranked a success. He backed away from conflicts with Germany in the Far East and the United States in Venezuela—not out of pacifism, but because he wanted Britain to be on good terms with all the world's major powers before he embarked upon his South African war. Salisbury's successors were unable to keep the peace with Germany. But when Germany did finally force a war against Britain, Germany fought with three weak allies, while Britain, in large part thanks to Salisbury's work, was backed by France, Russia, Italy, and eventually the United States.

So what then does this gruff, unsentimental old aristocrat have to teach us? Two things, principally.

First, conservative parties must cope with new social facts, but the right way to cope with them is often indirectly. Salisbury did not respond to the 1884 Reform Act either by turning the Conservatives into a quasi-socialist party (as his temperamental associate Randolph Churchill often seemed to want to do) or by appeasing Irish nationalism. He let his opponent succumb to both temptations, and then assembled a new coalition out of the Liberals who reacted against that succumbing. It's an example Republicans should bear in mind when they are told, for example, that they must accept bilingualism lest they alienate the growing Hispanic minority; true political wisdom may, in fact, take the form of a more subtle and less controversial adaptation to Hispanics' newfound electoral influence.

Also, Salisbury always took care to ensure that the elements he added to his coalition were growing ones: It was the white-collar middle-class he pursued, for instance, rather than the declining High Church vote, personally sympathetic as Salisbury was to the latter. When it was necessary, Salisbury sacrificed the churchmen—the new universal state schools he set up corroded the old system of state-supported Anglican schools—but he never ever got on the wrong side of suburban voters. That, too, is a good lesson to those conservatives (or quasi-conservatives) like Gary Bauer and Pat Buchanan who invoke protectionism to win the dwindling ballots of steelworkers and auto assemblers.

Second, it's smart for a right-of-center party to be nationalist, providing it keeps its nationalism within reasonable limits. It must respect the nation's willingness to pay the bills, and it must carefully avoid unnecessary foreign quarrels that risk restricting its freedom to maneuver when it really must act. Salisbury's preference for a non-interventionist approach to foreign affairs was not, as his opponents alleged, a sign of his "isolationism." It reflected rather an understanding that once he entangled himself in any one of the countless opportunities for entanglement that arose every day, he would lose much of his freedom to respond to any of the rest. Salisbury's twin priorities were expanding British power in Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean (to safeguard the Suez Canal) and in southern Africa (where he saw an opportunity to create another gigantic British dominion like Canada or Australia). Everywhere else—in the Caribbean where he was challenged by an obstreperous United States, in the Far East where Germany was seeking an empire of its own, and in Central Asia where Russia seemed to be closing in on India—he preferred to avoid committing himself.

Salisbury was not a glamorous man. In person, he was notoriously shabby. His speeches never packed the emotional voltage of Gladstone's. He utterly lacked the magnetic charm of Benjamin Disraeli, never mind the overwhelming personal charisma of his American contemporary and counterpart Theodore Roosevelt. His mind was subtle and indirect, and his methods unpleasantly tinged with deceit: Salisbury was almost Clintonian in his ability to give answers that were literally true but intentionally misleading, and when they failed to mislead, he did not scruple to lie outright. But his biographer Andrew Roberts is right: He deserves a titanic biography and, in *Salisbury: Victorian Titan*, he has gotten it. ♦

Reinventing Al Gore

Bill Turque's biography traces the rise of the young and restless son of a Tennessee senator. **BY MATTHEW REES**

It was February 1976 and Al Gore was at loose ends. For five years, he and his bubbly wife, Tipper, had been enjoying a comfortable life in Nashville. He was moderately successful as a reporter for the city's leading daily, the *Tennessean*, and he'd been enrolled in Vanderbilt University's law school and divinity school. Still, as the Harvard-educated son of a senator, he wasn't quite living up to others' expectations. His grades, for example, were horrendous (he failed five of his eight divinity courses and earned no degree from either school).

Inventing Al Gore
A Biography
by Bill Turque
Houghton Mifflin, 432 pp., $25

Matthew Rees is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

As for politics, he'd shown little interest since his father's defeat in 1970. Indeed, his political activity in Nashville had been limited to talking public policy while smoking reefer with a friend from the newspaper.

Then one day Gore got a call from the publisher of the *Tennessean* informing him that the congressman representing Carthage, Gore's hometown, was going to announce he wouldn't seek reelection. Moments after hanging up the phone, he told Tipper, "I think I'm going to run for Congress." Just as striking as this split-second decision is what the twenty-seven-year-old did next: He fell to the floor and started doing push-ups.

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As Bill Turque shows in his enlightening biography, *Inventing Al Gore*, the push-ups marked the end of Gore's carefree days. They also symbolized the end of his struggle with his father, who had prodded him to pursue politics from day one. Not only was Al running for Congress, he was doing so even younger than his father, who had first been elected at thirty-one. What's more, Gore's reflexive action after making up his mind was to launch into an exercise his father used to put him through daily before he dashed off to school.

As Gore moves closer to locking up his party's presidential nomination, there is endless droning about Bill Clinton as Banquo's ghost haunting the Gore campaign. In the public mind, that may be true. But in the vice president's mind, it's just as likely that the ghost of his father looms right alongside the shade of Saturday Night Bill.

Turque, who is particularly perceptive about Gore's early years, informs us that his father had high expectations for his son even before the child was born. While Gore's mother was pregnant with Al, her husband noticed that the birth of a baby girl to his chief competitor in Tennessee politics, congressman Estes Kefauver, had been written up on an inside page of the *Tennessean*. That wouldn't do for Gore Sr., who remarked, "If I have a boy baby, I don't want the news buried inside the paper. I want it on page one where it belongs." He lobbied the paper's editors to grant this extraordinary request, and they did. The day after Al Gore was born, the *Tennessean* ran a one-column headline, on the front page, trumpeting his arrival. "Before he was home from the hospital," writes Turque, "Al Gore had won a news cycle for his father."

In this account and others, Gore Sr. fits the stereotype of fathers insistent that their sons follow in their footsteps. That meant a rigorous upbringing for young Albert. In addition to the traditional grooming, there were the push-ups before school and manual labor through scorching Tennessee summers. When Gore's mother questioned whether fifteen-year-old Al should really plow a hillside steep enough to put him at risk, Gore Sr. shot back that "a boy could never be president if he couldn't plow with that damned hillside plow."

Like other politicians, Gore Sr. and his wife traveled frequently, often leaving Al with Carthage families. In Washington, the father never bothered to attend any of his son's football games, and when Al was a senior his parents had him board at his school, the exclusive St. Albans, while they campaigned for reelection. Given his father's heavy-handed ways, this absenteeism may have suited Al fine. Indeed, years later Tipper was asked about Al's relationship with his father. She laughed and said, "You remember Oedipus?" Similarly, Gore's mother once said Al "never wanted to be bossed by his father," and as a boy he "hated" being known as the son of a senator.

Gore dealt with his inner conflicts by taking a bold step in his first run for Congress: He asked his father not to campaign for him. "I don't want people voting for me because I'm Albert Gore's son," he told a family friend. He did this again when he first sought the White House in 1988. But his overbearing father found ways to intrude. Before the 1992 election, the *New York Times* reported that, soon after Gore's selection as Clinton's running mate, Gore Sr. had told a reporter, "We raised him for it." Asked about this, Al had heatedly objected, "That's not true. When I was growing up, I don't ever remember a time when either of my parents said: Don't you want to go into politics?" (Gore further revealed his sensitivity on this subject when he responded to the story with a curious letter to the *New York Times*. It said he felt "compelled to write by a glaring error of fact and interpretation" about his parents, but never identified the error.)

For all Turque's attention to the father-son relationship, the bond between the two remains something of a mystery. The political influence, however, is clear. Gore Sr. lost in 1970 primarily because he'd become too liberal for his state. Not only had he opposed the Vietnam war—an unpopular move in pro-military Tennessee—he'd also voted for gun control, against school prayer, against two conservative Supreme Court nominees from the South, and against a bill that would have banned busing. A September 1970 memo from H.R. Haldeman, President Nixon's chief of staff, laid out the strategy Republicans would use against him: Gore's "cocktail party liberalism offers a chance to rebut his folksy image." Aides to Gore's Republican opponent were instructed to publicize not only the dinner parties the senator attended, but also the type of menu ("The Frenchier the better").

So Al Gore went to great lengths while in the House and Senate not to become too liberal for his constituents. Early in his career, as Bill Bradley has been noting, Gore frequently voted against gun control and government funding of abortions, and for tobacco subsidies and tax breaks benefiting racially segregated schools. Once his aspirations reached beyond Tennessee to the White House, he dropped many of his more conservative stances in order to curry favor with liberal interest groups. Even then, though, Turque shows that he was more than happy to strike up an alliance with the right-leaning Dick Morris in 1995 in order to rescue the Clinton presidency.

This work with Morris reflects another lesson Gore learned from the 1970 Senate race, in which Gore Sr. was the target of countless attacks: Use slash-and-burn politics if that's what you need to win. Gore never faced any serious competition in Tennessee, but in his first run for president he attacked other Democrats so ruthlessly that party chairman Paul Kirk publicly pleaded for him to stop—he didn't—and New York governor Mario Cuomo characterized his style as "terribly dangerous."

The current campaign is no different. After a slow start, the vice president hired a murderers' row of advisers—Bob Shrum, Carter Eskew, and Harrison Hickman—best known for their merciless tactics. It's no coincidence that at the recent Harlem debate, when Bradley criticized Gore for not doing more to curb racial profiling, Gore's gutter-level response was to throw the issue back in Bradley's face,

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saying the practice had begun in his home state of New Jersey.

Throughout his political career, Gore has been driven in a way few other elected officials are. Like Newt Gingrich, he's exhibited an inflated interest in Answers to Big Questions, which has led him to espouse fringe theories on the environment and other issues. And despite his firsthand knowledge of the strains a political career places on a family, he kept one of the busiest schedules of anyone on Capitol Hill during his sixteen years in Congress. His family grew to include four children, and Tipper chafed at her husband's peripatetic ways. Still, she made the necessary sacrifices. In the mid-'80s, she carved out time to lead a crusade against explicit music lyrics and wrote a book entitled *Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated Society*. But when Al decided in 1987 to launch his presidential campaign, she abruptly canceled her national tour to promote the book.

Gore's ceaseless ambition appeared to have leveled off when he announced, in 1991, that he wasn't going to seek the White House. "I would like to be president," he said, "but I am also a father, and I feel deeply about my responsibility to my children." Tipper later told the *Washington Post* that he didn't run because "when it came down to the wire, he said, 'I'm not going to do it because I can't rip myself out of the fabric of your lives now.'"

But these explanations look hollow in retrospect, particularly after Gore used his speeches at the Democratic conventions of 1992 and 1996 to exploit family tragedies. Indeed, Gore ultimately did accept the vice presidency and all the burdens it carried. Why? He liked Clinton, George Bush no longer looked invincible, and he could keep his Senate seat if the ticket lost. Moreover, the post was one his dad had desperately wanted, but never got.

In *Inventing Al Gore*, Turque skillfully explores not just Gore's relationship with his father, but his time at St. Albans and Harvard, his experience in the military, and his congressional career. Turque was also the first to uncover Gore's extensive use of marijuana in his twenties. Unfortunately, the two final chapters of the biography, covering the vice president's ethical missteps and his posture during the Lewinsky matter, add little to the public record.

Gore Sr. died in December 1998, two weeks before his son described Bill Clinton as a man historians would deem "one of our greatest presidents." To the very end, he held out hope that Al would reach the very top of the greasy pole. "I had ambitions for the presidency," he told a reporter a few years ago. "It didn't turn out that way." Asked what he would feel if his son reached the Oval Office, he was almost embarrassingly candid: "How could a father be more satisfied?" With this last expectation to meet, Al Gore, one suspects, will be pounding out push-ups right up until Election Day. ♦

Buster Keaton's Comedy

The pratfalls of a hero in an unheroic age.

BY S.T. KARNICK

Most moviegoers—if they remember him at all—picture Buster Keaton as an absurd, slapstick clown, a charming but somewhat inferior rival to Charlie Chaplin from the days of silent film. And most movie critics—if they write of him at all—present Keaton as a tormented genius, abused by his father and exploited by greedy Hollywood studios, whose grim comedy revealed a meaningless, surreal world.

But the real Buster Keaton, as both a filmmaker and a man, remains quite far from these caricatures. Neither an entirely light, absurdist clown nor an utterly dark, surrealist figure, he combined elements far beyond absurdism and surrealism. Keaton was, in fact, the first great comic *realist* of American cinema—while simultaneously a great comic *idealist*. To watch the films from his peak is to see Galahad, the ideal Christian hero, set comically loose in a real, modern world that seems to have little room for ideals, Christians, or heroes.

Keaton appeared in fifteen Fatty Arbuckle "shorts" from 1917 to 1920, then obtained his own studio and, with full creative control, made twenty shorts and eleven longer "features," from *The Saphead* in 1920 to *The Cameraman* in 1928. But within a few years after his last silent feature, Keaton was nearly forgotten—until 1949, when the critic James Agee ranked him with Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, and Harry Langdon in a *Life* magazine cover story on "Comedy's Greatest Era." Agee's assessment revived Keaton's career and inspired increasing critical esteem. Andrew Sarris ranked Keaton as one of the greatest directors of all time. By the 1990s, Keaton's reputation had begun to surpass even Chaplin's.

Agee correctly asserted that Keaton "brought pure physical comedy to its greatest heights," but his emphasis on the actor's stoicism and "mechanistic gags" made the result seem far more distant than Keaton really was. "He was the only major comedian who kept sentiment almost entirely out of his work," wrote Agee (ignoring both W.C. Fields and the great amount of real sentiment in Keaton's films). "Beneath his lack of emotion," he continued, "there was in his comedy a freezing whisper not of pathos but of melancholia," though there was "a fine, still, and sometimes dreamlike beauty."

All the grand clichés about Keaton begin with Agee. Tom Dardis's 1979 biography, *Keaton: The Man Who Wouldn't Lie Down*, depicts the comic as a melancholy, sexually promiscuous alcoholic whose father had beat him and

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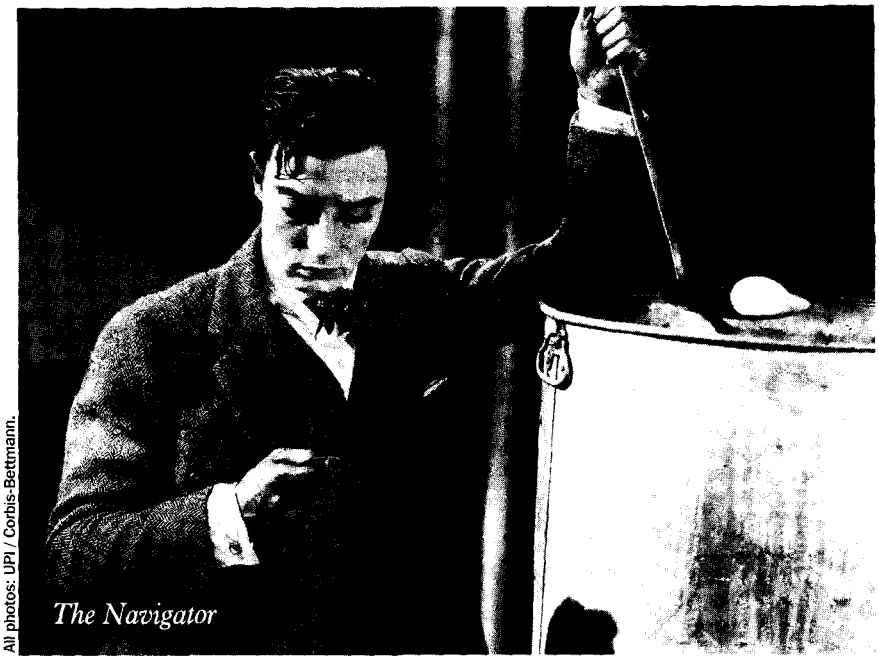

The Navigator

All photos: UPI / Corbis-Bettmann.

whose second wife resorted to prostitution when their finances ran low. Robert Knopf, in his 1999 *The Theater and Cinema of Buster Keaton*, argues that Keaton "achieves the surrealists' goal of blending dream and reality in cinema, and thereby expanding our vision of human life in a material world." Even the playwright Samuel Beckett contributed to the legend of Keaton as melancholy philosopher, casting him as "the man" in his gloomy *Film* (1966). As Dardis puts it, Keaton's films have come to be seen "as paradigms of the human condition, as existential films."

This is a serious distortion of film history. Keaton's movies are often brilliantly zany, and a few contain sequences that turn out to be dreams, but this does not make him a surrealist. Surrealists do not try to make dreams seem real; they impose dream logic on reality.

In the 1999 *Silent Echoes: Discovering Early Hollywood Through the Films of Buster Keaton*, Keaton fan John Bengston shows just how realistic Keaton's films really were. In contrast to many comic filmmakers of the time, Keaton shot almost all his films on location, and he packed them with long shots that placed the characters firmly in real places. He made *Cops* (1922), *Sherlock, Jr.* (1924), and *Seven Chances* (1925) on locations throughout California. He filmed *College* (1927) at USC and UCLA, shot *Go West* (1925) in the Arizona desert, and recorded the underwater scenes of *The Navigator* (1924) in Lake Tahoe. His first feature, *The Saphead*, opens with bustling exterior shots of Wall Street. To film a conference room overlooking the ocean for *The Navigator*, Keaton had his crew build a set near the San Diego harbor so that audiences would be able to see the sea through the windows. *The Cameraman* includes extensive sequences shot in New York. Keaton even went to Oregon to film *The General* (1927) on the last remaining narrow-gauge railroad tracks of the type used during the Civil War. For the film's climax he burned a wooden bridge to send a real locomotive crashing into a river, allegedly the most expensive shot in film until that time.

Keaton's comic realism served a vision quite antithetical to the existentialism now so frequently attributed to him. His zenith spanned the transition from the Victorian era to the Machine Age, and his films consistently satirized the follies of the modern world. In his first solo picture, the two-reeler *One Week* (1920), Keaton and bride Sybil Seely assemble a prefabricated house given to them as a wedding present. A shot of Keaton and Sybil in their splendid wedding clothes in a drab neighborhood, glumly sitting on a crate labeled, "HOME: Portable House Co." captures the age's passion for gadgets, shaky adherence to traditional values, and impossible dreams of perfect efficiency. It turns out that Keaton's former rival has switched the numbers on the crates, and despite the couple's hard work, the house turns into a ghastly lump of mismatched pieces and freakish angles.

The comic bleakness of the film's ending is particularly striking: Finding out that they have built their house on the wrong lot, Keaton and Sybil prop it on barrels to move it. The house gets stuck on the train tracks—of course!—and as the newlyweds cover their ears in anticipation, the train passes by on a parallel track. As they breathe a sigh of relief, another train roars past and demolishes the house.

This sense of the twentieth century's implacability suffuses Keaton's films and fits neatly with his film persona. He was a little man, short and slight, but also muscular, surprisingly strong, fast, and agile. He had to be, or his characters would have had no chance to survive. In *The Electric House* (1922), Keaton, a botanist, is mistakenly hired to wire a mansion for electricity and install all the latest gadgets. This he does with characteristic abandon, creating dining chairs that move automatically, a pool table that returns the balls to the rack, and other such impressively unnecessary gadgets. The real electrical engineer, however, exacts revenge by switching around the wires, and the predictable comic chaos ensues. Keaton ultimately manages to put things right, but that is when the film becomes really interesting. The house's owner angrily fires him, and the owner's daughter rejects him. Keaton then attempts suicide by drowning and fails, ending up shot out of a sewer pipe onto a river bank.

Such unambiguously bitter endings are common in Keaton's early, short films. *Daydreams* (1922) closes with Keaton trying unsuccessfully to shoot himself. At the end of *Cops*, he is rejected by his girlfriend and gives himself up to the hundreds of angry policemen who have been chasing him throughout most of the film. (The last shot shows his porkpie hat resting on a tombstone bearing the words "The End.") The first half of *Hard Luck* (1921) depicts Keaton in several unsuccessful suicide attempts. The feature *College* ends with a sardonic depiction of "happily ever after": a

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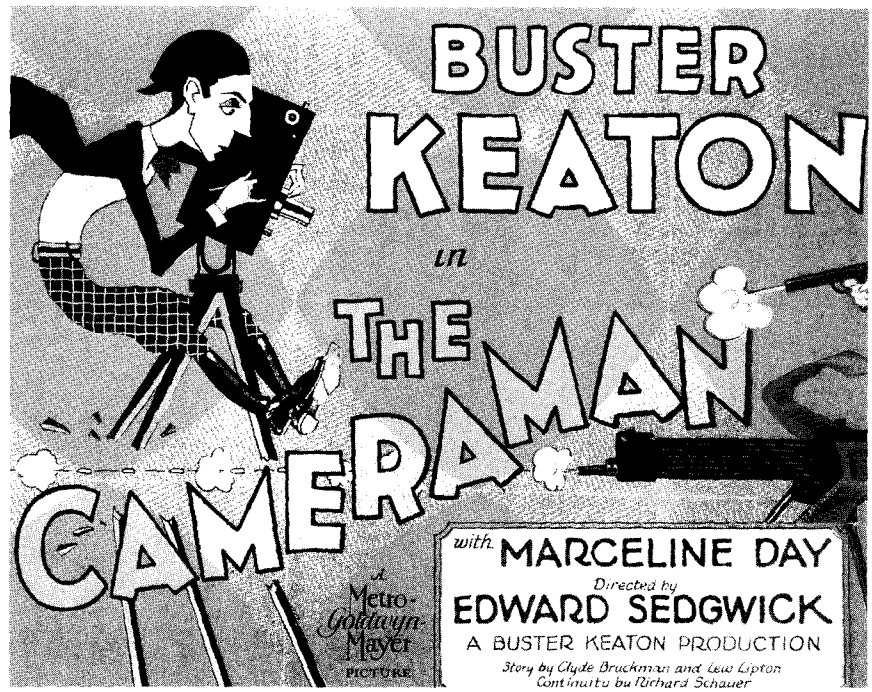
cramped apartment, angry arguments, and then two gravestones.

Largely, however, this cynicism is confined to the early shorts; most of the features have straightforward happy endings. Moreover, although the surfaces of the films are often brittle and sardonic, the ideas underneath them are solid and decent. Keaton wants a wife, children, a church wedding, a good job, a decent house, stability, and a chance to make something of himself. The respect of his elders, mostly men, is necessary to obtain all these, notably in *The Saphead*, *The Navigator*, *Battling Butler* (1926), and *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928), in each of which he plays a spoiled youth who must prove his mettle before he can marry his sweetheart.



Keaton and Chaplin in Limelight *(1952)*

Success in Keaton's films is measured by achievement: piloting a boat, building a house, fixing a car, winning a boxing match, filming a tong war, catching a whale, catching a stolen locomotive, capturing a jewel thief. Keaton struggles against great odds: a cyclone in *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, the Union army in *The General*, policemen in *Cops* and *Daydreams*, a stampede in *Go West*, an avalanche of boulders and would-be brides in *Seven Chances* (1925), and, always, the rivals out to grab his girl through muscle or guile. Despite the hopeless odds, Keaton perseveres, and his best films—*The General*, *Sherlock, Jr.*, *The Navigator*, *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, and *Seven Chances*—track his progress from unworthiness to redemption.

What Agee and other critics have mistaken as existential resignation is simply Keaton's American tenacity. A little man with big problems—the diverse horrors of modernity—Keaton cannot afford to be frivolous. He was called "the Great Stone Face," but he refrained from smiling in his films because his characters had much work to do before they could gain the women they desired. The young ladies agree with this arrangement, and they frequently pitch in to help, often comically, as when Marion Mack, in *The General*, tries to stoke the train's fire by dropping a few tiny twigs into the boiler. (Keaton reaches forward to strangle her, then stops and kisses her.)

Unlike Chaplin, who is an unabashed individualist and even something of an aristocrat underneath his shabby clothing, Keaton wants to fit in, and his films support conventional morality against Jazz Age libertinism. In Chaplin's films, a character's worth is expressed not in the morality or social appropriateness of his actions but in the grace and style with which they're performed. In Keaton's world, character is expressed through what a person does rather than how he does it. In fact, Keaton's rare jaunty moments usually presage disaster, as in *Daydreams* when he leaps onto a ferry boat to escape the police and waves at them sardonically—only to discover that the boat is arriving, not leaving. Keaton shows a sharp eye for hypocrisy, and his films mock deviations from conventional morality rather than adherence to it. Chaplin's world is rather antinomian, while Keaton's is quite thoroughly Victorian. A title card in *The Three Ages* (1923) describes the modern age as a place of "speed, need, and greed."

Keaton himself was unfit for that modern age. He unwisely gave up his own studio and signed with MGM in 1928, and within half a decade his career and personal life were in a shambles. He lost creative control over his films and descended into alcoholism, divorce, and bankruptcy. Teamed in a series of talkies with Jimmy Durante, whose verbal humor never meshed with Keaton's physical emphasis, he faded away. In 1933 he was released from MGM.

He quickly displayed, however, the same determination in his life that he had shown on screen. He gave up drinking, found the right woman in third wife Eleanor, and resumed acting and gag writing (although for much less money and with no creative control). From the

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Steamboat Bill, Jr.

appearance of the Agee essay until he died in 1966, he had no trouble finding work—though he was usually reduced to playing a befuddled old man (as in *Beach Blanket Bingo* and *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini*) or merely himself, a once famous silent film star (as in his cameo role in *Sunset Boulevard*).

In all his greatest films, Keaton regularly drives his protagonists into astoundingly harrowing situations from which even Keaton's ingenuity, athleticism, and perseverance cannot save them. Something else must intervene. In *The General*, for example, Keaton plays Johnnie Gray, a train engineer whose locomotive has been stolen by Union raiders. Chasing after them in another engine, Johnnie finds a railroad mortar on a side track and attaches it to his car to fire shells at the marauders. Unfortunately, the mortar car becomes uncoupled as it bounces on the tracks, and the gun lowers until it is aimed directly at Johnnie in the engine up ahead. By some odd miracle, the mortar fires just as the engine is rounding a corner, and the shell misses Johnnie.

Similarly, in *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, Keaton finds himself standing before a house during a violent windstorm. The entire front section of the house falls forward onto him, and he escapes death only because a large, open window happens to pass over him as the façade crashes to the ground. In *Hard Luck* (1921), Keaton, "fired from his job, jilted by his girl, and down on his luck," as a title card puts it, attempts various methods of suicide, all of which fail quite implausibly. In *The Navigator*, Keaton and sweetheart Betsy are attacked by cannibals while on their yacht. They escape into a canoe, but it springs a leak. Sinking and surrounded by cannibals, they appear to be doomed. He takes her into his arms and they slide into the sea—only to arise moments later on a surfacing submarine.

In some of his early short films (most notably *Sherlock, Jr.*), Keaton explains the miracles by revealing the narrative as a dream, but in the later features this hoary device would not work, and he did not use it. Of course, that means that the countless hairbreadth escapes require some other explanation, and in his influential 1966 biography, *Keaton*, Rudi Blesh supplied the most popular one: The great comic had a fatalistic conception of "man at the mercy of both chance and The Machine."

That same year, however, Bosley Crowther, in the *New York Times*'s obituary, noted that Keaton required of audiences a certain spiritual sensitivity. Crowther was right. If the films had really been about existential fatalism, the characters in them would not have survived the catastrophes they faced. Keaton's films are, in fact, the cinematic equivalent of the Argument from Design—all the clues point to the existence of a God the Designer, even in the midst of modern chaos. Modern man's attempts to build a purely human order always fail, while the providential design of the world often triumphs.

In *The Saphead*, for example, Keaton ineptly tries to appear modern—cynical and hedonistic—to win his girl, Agnes, because a book has told him, "The modern girl has no use for old-fashioned men." Terribly ashamed, he confesses: "I've tricked you into loving me—when you know the truth I'm afraid you won't care for me any more. . . . I'm good! . . . I've tried my best to get over it—but I can't and I still kneel down and say my prayers every morning—before I go to bed." This wins Agnes's love. Keaton's goal in *Seven Chances* is to get to a church and marry his true love, and in *Neighbors* (1920) he is trying to reach the preacher's house for the same purpose. The climax of *The Scarecrow* (1920) finds Keaton and his fiancée racing through the streets on a motorcycle seeking a preacher. They literally run into one, and he begins the ceremony perched on Keaton's fiancée's lap on the motorcycle.

In *My Wife's Relations* (1922), *The Blacksmith* (1922), and *Spite Marriage* (1929), by contrast, Keaton is married in civil ceremonies and the unions turn out to be catastrophes. Indeed, through all Keaton's films, when he relies on his fellow men, it leads to disaster, and when he puts his trust in God, all is well.

There are some explicit nods to Christian imagery in these films. Keaton imitates Samson in *The Three Ages*, finally defeating his rival and winning the day. In *The Saphead*, Keaton's character, Bertie Van Alstyne, is nicknamed "The Lamb." Similarly, just after Keaton's implausibly failed suicide attempts in *Hard Luck*, he encounters a man walking across water. Keaton tries it and falls in; the man was a pool cleaner walking on stilts.

It's not typically Christian imagery that characterizes Keaton's movies, however, but a Christian worldview—or rather, an old-fashioned Christian knight set loose to walk through a modern landscape that isn't knightly or Christian. He is always in the world but not of it, which is the source of the curious gracefulness he shows and the simultaneous disaster he makes of things. Both the lightness and the darkness of the comedy of Buster Keaton derive from the fact that he is a hero—in a world in which God alone still recognizes heroes. ♦

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IN ESCALATING RHETORIC, MCCAIN DENOUNCES REAGAN

BOLD ATTACK ON "BAD THINGS"

Maverick Takes Aim at 1980s, Tax Cuts, Defense Build-Up

By Richard L. Berke

SIMI VALLEY, Calif., March 28 — Continuing his bold campaign to purge the Republican Party of what he termed "the forces of reaction," Senator John McCain once again ventured into the belly of the beast today, traveling to the Reagan Presidential Library in this picturesque hilltop town to denounce President Ronald Reagan as an "amiable dunce who couldn't find his ass with both hands."

Speaking to an enthusiastic audience of 3,000 journalists, reporters, editors, writers, and columnists – who the maverick presidential candidate said represented the "diversity and inclusiveness of our crusade" – Mr. McCain took direct aim at one of the undisputed icons of the Republican Party, which political observers say has been dominated by Falangist elements since Mr. Reagan's election in 1980.

"It is time – no, my friends, it is past time – to return this party to the principles of its roots," said Mr. McCain. "Or maybe the roots of its principles. Whatever. The fact is, we are the party of Nelson Rockefeller, not Heinrich Himmler. We're the party of Wendell Willkie, not Lauch Faircloth."

Aides said Mr. McCain's speech was the latest in a series of carefully crafted moves aimed not only at reinforcing the candidate's maverick image but also at boldly advancing a "grand realignment" within the GOP itself. In late February, Mr. McCain delivered a bold speech against the evangelical leaders Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson in Virginia. The speech was followed two weeks later by an elaborate wreath-laying ceremony at the grave of Elliot Richardson, where Mr. McCain wept openly. More recently, Mr. McCain has campaigned wearing a "Free Mumia" bandanna wrapped around his head.

Although aides say Mr. McCain is deeply reluctant to make any reference to his years as a Vietnam POW, the maverick presidential candidate closed his bold speech here today with a rare anecdote drawn from the experience.

"Standing in the prison yard under the pitiless sun of noonday, the prisoner was approached by one of his jailers," Mr. McCain said. "Casually, as if by accident, the captor threw a button at his captive's feet. The prisoner strained his eyes to make out the words. And then he saw them: 'Re-elect Ford in '76.'

"My friends, the prisoner knew at once that this gook was onto something. Even though the 1976 election was several years away – indeed, even though President Ford had not yet taken office – I knew that the assault against his visionary leadership of moderate Republicanism – an assault undertaken by Reagan and his far-right allies – was an assault which I would gladly fight with every fiber of my being, fiber by fiber if necessary."

While Mr. McCain's speech was warmly received, McCain backer William J. Bennett said the senator may have "gone overboard" in his prepared remarks when he called former first lady Nancy Reagan a "dried-up old

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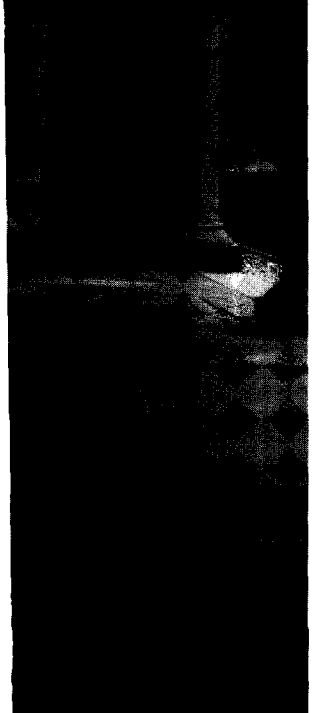
Why Washington Doesn't Work

David Brady is a senior fellow, Hoover Institution; associate dean and the Bowen H. and Janice Arthur McCoy Professor of Business and the Changing Environment, and Ethics, Stanford Graduate School of Business; and professor of political science, Stanford University.



Over the past twenty years American national government has been unified under the Democrats, fully divided both ways–Republican presidents, Democratic Congress and vice versa–and partially divided. With the possible exception of Reagan's first year, the consensus seems to be that public policy has not shifted much. What accounts for the failure of government to break gridlock? Permit me to offer four reasons.

Government Inaction

In the United States, party positions on issues vary across the country. The Democratic Parties in Texas and California differ on gun control. Likewise there will be differences among local and state parties across the 435 congressional districts on affirmative action, tax policy, and many other issues. One reason that members of the same party vary on policy is that the influence of interest groups varies across regions and districts. Environmentalists are more numerous and influential in the West than in the East. The National Organization for Women is more influential in the North than in the South. This sorting of the myriad American interests yields conservative Democrats and moderate Republicans who often vote against their party.

The views of voters themselves sort out in similar ways. For example, about 70 percent of Californians of both parties are pro-choice; thus former governor Pete Wilson was pro-choice even though the national party's position is pro-life. In short, one cannot use party control of government to predict policies.

In most votes, a simple majority is not all that is required to win a vote in Congress. The major supermajority provisions are the two-thirds vote required to override the president's veto and Senate Rule XXII (the filibuster), which requires sixty senators to move legislation. These rules enable members of Congress who are far from the middle ground on policy to exert influence on policy.

Hard Choices

The varying strength of interest groups, regional differences in voters' views, the need to build supermajorities in Congress–all play a role in government inaction. But perhaps the most fundamental cause is that the issues are difficult and that neither the people nor their representatives know how to solve them and maintain a majority. There is a lack of consensus not only in Congress but among the public. Public opinion favors expanded health coverage but not if taxes are increased or quality is decreased. It is hard to determine whether votes are inherently unrealistic or whether their lack of realism has been induced by decades of promises to solve hard problems at no cost. Whatever the case, it is clear that voters reward politicians like Reagan, who emphasize the positive, and punish those like Mondale, who promised tax increases. We can then expect more promises of pointless solutions to problems from politicians.

Yet making public policy differs from talking about it in an election. In the policy world, presidents must propose how they will deal with health care, the Middle East, and improving educational opportunities. Whoever is elected in the 2000 elections will face hard choices where trade-offs and compromises, not party election rhetoric, will carry the day.

— David Brady

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